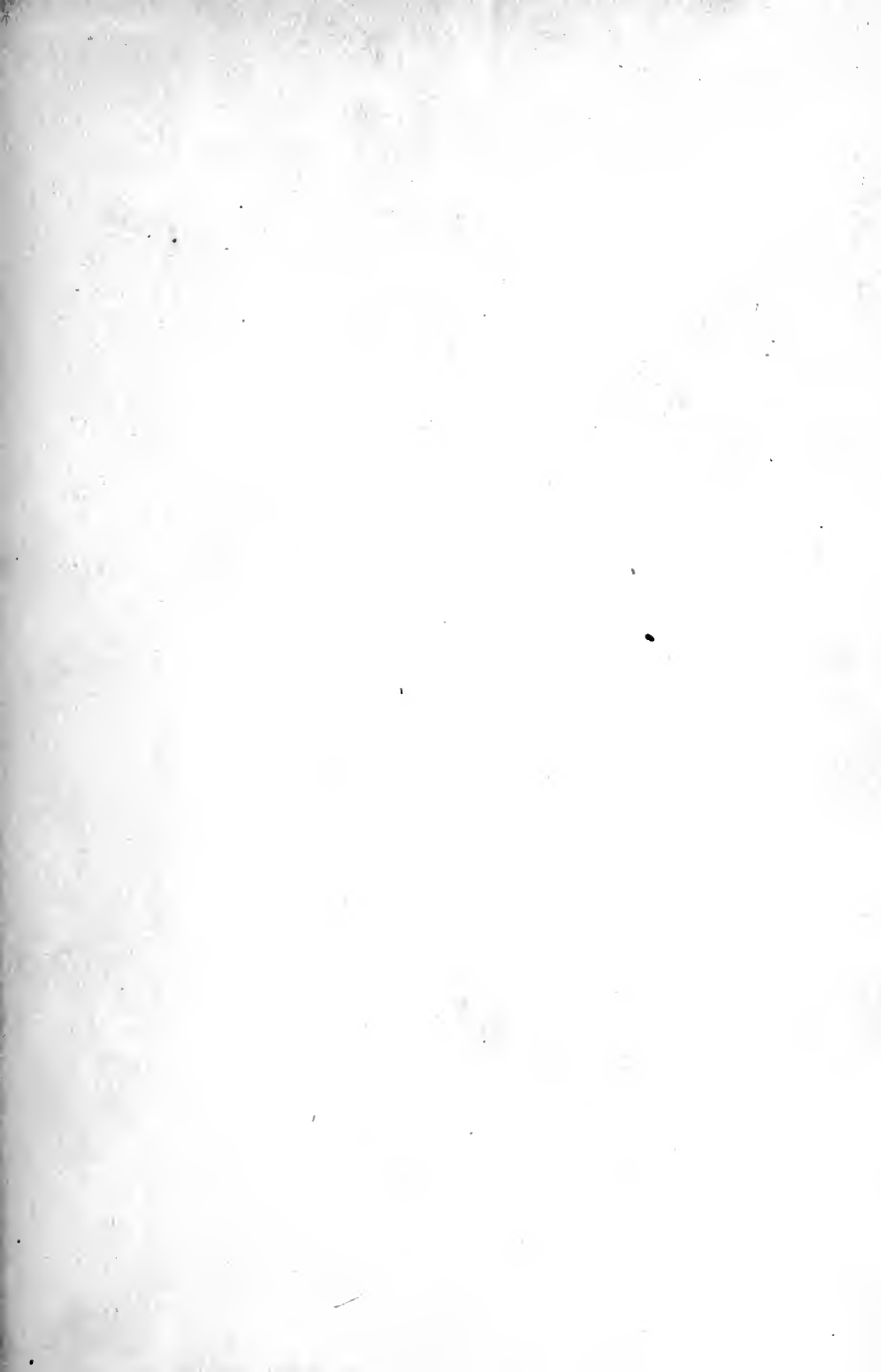


A dark, high-contrast black and white photograph of a pine tree. The tree's trunk and branches are silhouetted against a lighter, textured background. The title 'GRET' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font at the top. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

GRET

BEATRICE MANTLE

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GRET



“‘You ’re too smart for every-day use,’ she remarked witheringly”

GRET

The Story of a Pagan



BY

BEATRICE MANTLE



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GRET

“Between her and the Hidden One”

GRET

CHAPTER I

WHEREIN GRET IS INTRODUCED

A BRIGHT afternoon in March—with patches of brilliant gold light on the river and a sweet misty green on the densely clothed overhanging banks; with crisp air, through which the hum of the distant donkey-engines and the whirr of the nearer ones sounded clear like music on accustomed ears, and in which the swish and ripple of the outgoing tide formed one long singing murmur.

Gret Silway lay on the mossy top of the bluff in front of her home. Her elbows were dug deep into the moss, and her young body lay along it in lithe, sinuous repose. But, in spite of the repose—even laziness—of her attitude, she was very much on the alert. She was watching with keen eyes the mouth of the boom in the river beneath her. Just as much at home in the workings of it as any of her father's men, she knew by the activity and haste going on within that a raft must be going down. She was puzzled, though, on account of the tide, which had been running out for the last half-hour or more.

From where she lay she commanded a view of all important points. A little below, on the other side of the river, was the floating camp-landing; and leading from

that, and soon lost to sight in the swamp alder, was the board-walk and trolley-way leading to the camp. Beneath her, at the foot of the bluff, was their own little house-landing; and a short distance above, leading up the river, was the boom, packed with some of the finest logs in the state. No one could get to the boom from the camp without her noticing, and no raft would go down without Dick coming to oversee it. So she lay and waited, watching with critical eyes the men roll out the logs.

Presently, hurrying down the board-walk from the camp, came a boy; and at sight of him Gret jumped up.

"Oly, oh, Oly!" Oly looked up quickly. "Raft going down?"

Oly nodded vigorously, and pointed behind him with many signs; and in a second or so the reason for all this dumb show appeared in the person of Dick Swinton, camp foreman, boom boss and everything else that was important in the management of Silway's camp. Not on his life, knowing of Dick's proximity, would Oly dare to shout an affirmative answer to Gret's question.

Dick Swinton was a man of few words, and much knowledge in certain grooves; he was, moreover, a man of considerable tact, and handled men and logs with equal facility. He managed Silway's camp and made a big success. But he undertook another management at about the same time and made a howling failure of it—a failure plain to the eyes of all men. He proposed to manage Gret Silway, seeing that she was yearly growing in need of this service, with seemingly no one at hand who cared to perform it. Only, this time honest, well-meaning Dick had undertaken something quite beyond both his tact and his knowledge.

Among other things, there was a settled formula between Gret and Dick—observed just as regularly as a raft

went down the river—whereby he should do his best to beg, persuade or threaten her out of going down on it, and she should just as carefully disregard it all. It was a very useless formula, always had been, always would be. Dick himself admitted that if he had a dollar for every raft that had gone down the river this last two years without Gret on it he would not be much better off. Still, he always went through the usual ceremony, being honestly afraid for the life of the girl. Some time ago two girls had ventured on a raft tied up midway down on the river. Stepping on a rolling log one of the girls was drowned beneath the raft, and her companion was drowned in trying to save her. This had given Dick a scare from which he did not seem inclined to recover; though most of the camp hands—the old ones, at all events, who knew Gret thoroughly—laughed at the mere idea of her ever being drowned.

“Gret knows the sight of a rolling log just as well as she knows her dinner,” they said time and again. But still Dick remained apprehensive.

“If the rafts were made same as they do back east, I would n’t care,” he would grumble. “They ’re chained good and hard together—just as safe as a boat. But these logs, rolling around loose in the boomsticks—that ’s no place for a bit of a girl.” Nevertheless, the bit of a girl continued to go.

Gret stood waiting on the bluff until she saw Dick get into his boat and paddle off to get the boomsticks that lay stretched along the side of the river. Then with a whoop of glee she flew down the somewhat rickety steps built down the side of the bluff, jumped into her boat with a recklessness born of long experience, and with about three paddles, gondolier fashion, was up alongside the carefully unobservant foreman.

“The end stick ’s caught a little in the mud already,”

she observed, noticing the tall figure in the boat sway slightly in the effort to drag the lagging sticks after him. "Why, Dick, tide 's been running out nearly an hour. What is it—hurry call?"

"Yes—towboat 's coming nearly all the way," replied Dick promptly. "This won't be nothing worth your bothering about, Gret."

Gret accepted this preliminary protest as a matter of form; that is, she took no notice of it. She turned her attention to Oly, who was getting ready the boat in which to accompany the raft.

"Not that boat," with a quick shake of the head. "Too blunt. Don't you remember how it slap-slapped behind the towboat before? Take Dick's."

"He won't let me, will he?" half making as if to row toward that dignity.

Gret regarded the youth with calm exasperation. "Not while he 's in it, of course. Wait till he gets out."

Oly obeyed meekly; and presently, just as the boom-sticks were chained and the raft set free, he succeeded in making the required change.

Gret went sailing off on the raft, having disregarded with a smile Dick's request that, if she must go down, she would sit in the boat with Oly instead of standing on the raft.

As the raft glided away, Jake Connor, the camp cook, strolled down the board-way. "Gone already? Pretty swift work, was n't it?"

Dick nodded. "Towboat will be more than half-way to meet her."

"Of course, Gret had to go," laughed Jake.

"Oh, of course," a trifle petulantly.

Jake looked after the diminishing figure of the girl, at the short skirt that barely reached her ankles, and the battered remnant of hat swinging lightly on her arm; he

looked at the broad chest and the powerful poise of the youthful form, and then turned by Dick's side back to the camp up the board-way.

"She 's a great girl, is Gret," he observed. "Cut a pretty wide swath, I fancy, wherever she 's set down."

"Cut a pretty wide hole in the river first," responded Dick shortly. And Jake, with a sharp, quizzical glance at his companion, dropped the subject.

Meanwhile Gret, all unconscious of this mournful prophecy concerning her future, drifted in great contentment of spirit down with the tide. It was the sweet uncertainty of the course that pleased her, otherwise the drifting process must have been slow. But to be carried quickly—too quickly—by the hurrying tide round a sharp bend and landed in the opposite bank; and then to watch the waters come bustling round, lifting a little here, drifting out a little there, until at last they were borne off again in triumph—to do the same thing round the next bend, or perhaps just to miss it by a hair's breadth—oh, it was fine! It reminded Gret of Rube Drexel up at the camp, who always made such a fuss and splutter over doing nothing.

It was over a week since Gret had been down the river, and she watched the banks with observant eyes. Presently they passed a somewhat dejected-looking ranch, standing on a bit of marsh at the river edge. Upward, at the back of this, stretched a shallow gulch clothed with timber: and down this Gret was surprised to see a solitary horse hauling logs. A track across the strip of marsh had been dug and sluiced, and the animal waded through several feet of mud to the river.

Gret stared; she had been born and raised amid the lumbering business, but never had she seen things managed exactly like this. She turned to Oly in the boat behind her. "Why, what 's he doing?"

"Hand-logging," replied the lad. "Widow McCarty's sold all her timber to him. She's a fool to do it, *I* say. That feller would n't give her no such price as anybody else would have done."

"Well, but— He's doing it all in such a funny way," persisted Gret. "When people hand-log they generally have a sort of windlass thing that draws the log along. But he—What's he got all that mud for?"

Oly contemplated operations grimly as the raft swung past. "That poor, onery horse could n't draw a log acrost dry ground," he explained. "The mud makes it kind of slick, greases it like, so it don't stick and bite the ground. The darn feller's too mean to set up a windlass."

"It must be very horrid for the poor horse, walking up and down all day in that mud," went on Gret, still frowning.

"Well, would n't be so bad jest in the daytime, if he'd throw a bucket or two of water over it and wash it off night-times," said Oly, regarding the receding scene with disfavor. "But he don't. He turns the poor thing into the barn jest as it is. Wonder it don't get mud fever and die. Would," added he with youthful cynicism, "if he was a poor man trying to do his best."

Gret's eyes grew wide as she listened. "Well, what does the Widow McCarty allow him to do it for? I thought she was supposed to be a What-do-you-call-it."

"Dunno. Something that's supposed to be extry good," said Oly, scratching his head thoughtfully with the peak of his cap. "Oh, she don't like it at all, they say. But what can she do 'bout it? She's sold the timber, and the feller's got to be allowed to get it off'n the land. She says she hopes Providence 'll interfere. *She* can't do nothing."

Gret glanced at the lad in disgust; but Oly was still looking up-stream, and so remained unconcerned. If one thing disgusted the girl more than another it was this clapping onto Providence of the work people did not care about doing themselves. Providence was at best an exceedingly vague institution with Gret, standing principally for that law of contrary which generally contrived to have people do the things they did n't want to do and leave undone the things they did. She had been told that these revised arrangements were always for the best in the long run, but considered this a statement to be taken under advisement. At all events, whatever it was, one thing was sure about this Providence: it was a very slow-going arrangement; and as Gret's affairs were always conducted with alarming vigor, she would have scorned its aid.

She said nothing more about the McCarty ranch; but Oly, turning his attention back to her presently, observed that she was getting up steam. This was his term for the peculiar deep breaths that were characteristic of her. In a few minutes, however, the towboat came in sight round the bend of the river; and in the excitement of being taken in tow everything else was apparently forgotten. Oly, in view of the long row back and the approaching dinner hour, wanted to leave the raft as soon as the towline was out; but Gret insisted on being towed down to the mill. After a stormy discussion it was settled that they should only go as far as the first bridge; but as the first bridge was quite near the mill, the concession was a mere formality.

As they left the raft and turned back home Oly was sullen and Gret filled with glee. Oly was bucking tide, and vowing with every stroke not to be such a fool as to listen to Gret again. He had said this five hundred times before, though, and Gret was wholly undisturbed. But in

view of such a shocking exhibition of temper she refused to help with the rowing.

By and by, however, the tide ceased to run out, rowing became easier, and by the time the McCarty ranch was reached equanimity had been restored. Gret said nothing further on the ill-used horse subject; but she eyed the scene narrowly as they rowed past. Oly, accustomed by long and sometimes sad experience to Gret's methods, wondered which was coming in for the fruits of her displeasure: the widow or the logger. He rather thought the logger. He never supposed for a moment that Gret had dismissed the matter from her mind. He knew of old that she said least when most was intended.

When at last they reached the camp-landing, Gret did not wait for Oly to accompany her as usual. She jumped out, and raced up the board-way alone, leaving Oly to tie up the boat and follow when he chose.

Reaching the camp, Gret went straight to the cook-house, where Jake was busy making pies. She jumped up on her favorite seat—the top of the table—and drew a deep swelling breath. Jake, pausing with a pie-lid in his fingers, glanced round apprehensively; he knew as surely as if she had uttered a war-whoop that Gret had entered the battle-field under some flag or other.

Jake Connor had been cook in Silway's camp for three years, considering the post a fairly comfortable one; he had also occupied for the same period the far more onerous position of adviser-in-chief to the boss's daughter. Jake, having knocked about the world from pillar to post, and having been almost everything a man of adventurous bent can be, had in the course of his varied career acquired a sort of adjustable philosophy that had taken Gret's ear in the early days of their acquaintanceship. In the first instance Jake had occupied the position of mentor and adviser to a somewhat refractory being with

pride, but latterly this honor was weighing heavily upon him. He was divided between fear of having his advice rejected with scorn if it were not up to the required standard of vigor, and of having it immediately acted upon if it were. He wondered what was coming now, but asked no questions, it being an item of his philosophy never to meet trouble half-way.

"Jake," began the girl, "what is—?" She broke off, her eyes wandering down the line of pies. "What kind of pies are you making?"

"Mince," replied Jake, knowing that as far as Gret was concerned the list might begin and end there.

"Oh!" contentedly. "I 'll come in to supper, Jake. You won't be making mince much longer, will you?"

"No; but I thought your mother said you were to be home for dinner always," said Jake.

"Well, I 'm going home to dinner," calmly. "We have dinner at five, you have supper at six. You know that."

"Oh!" said Jake lamely, not without reflections upon Gret's appetite.

"Jake," began the girl once more, "what is Providence?"

Jake turned round and stared at his interlocutor, a circular pie-lid hanging in his fingers.

"If you hold that pie paste much longer the bottom half will drop off on the floor," remarked Gret dryly after a moment.

Thus adjured, Jake turned back to the table and adjusted the lid to the pie, reflecting meanwhile on the safest and most sensible way of replying to the momentous question just propounded.

"Well," he said thoughtfully, then, "it 's what punishes people when they do wrong."

"Oh!" There was a distinct note of interest in Gret's voice.

Sometime and somewhere Jake had listened to the declamation at an election meeting of a certain portion of "Macbeth." He had been particularly struck at the time with the completeness and finality of the famous statement that "murder will out." He conceived that it would put a fine touch to his explanations now.

"You see," he went on confidentially, "if you do a murder that you think nobody knows anything about, Providence will find you out and punish you. As Sha—"

"It won't at all," broke in Gret indignantly. "The police will, and the law will hang you."

"Well," said Jake unabashed, "it 's Providence makes them do it, though."

"Oh!" Gret's tone was receptive once more. "I see. Then if you feel like you wanted to punish any one it 's Providence making you feel that way."

But Jake scented danger, and attempted to back out. "Well, I don't know that it 's exactly like that," he said carefully. "People don't generally know when they 're workin' for Providence. 'T ain't never safe to calculate that you 're a special messenger of that kind. You won't know anything about it when you are."

Gret nodded, but absently. She had hardly listened to this last discourse, for the simple reason that it was not altogether to her liking. She possessed the happy knack of taking to heart just so much of a fact as suited her purpose and coolly rejecting the remainder.

"And so," she went on thoughtfully, after a moment, "Providence does n't bother people unless it is to punish them?"

Jake cast a hasty glance backward over his sojourning in this vale of sorrow. "Nope."

Gret said no more, but gave a little contented sigh. It was satisfactory, at any rate, to have relegated Providence to some kind of a definite place in the order of

things, instead of having it forever bobbing up where least expected, like a will-o'-the-wisp on the marsh of life. And Jake, too, glad to let so momentous a subject drop, turned the subject into other channels.

"Robin went down to the Harbor to-day."

"Yes, I know."

"How is it you did n't go along?"

Gret's lip curled. "Father sent one of his letters."

Jake shrugged his shoulders a trifle contemptuously. It was a fad of Mr. Silway's to send, from that city, where he sojourned most of his time, periodical letters announcing his return at any date from the time of writing. This he fondly imagined tended to preserve discipline—to be, in fact, tantamount to a command to stand at arms all through home and camp. In reality no one took the least notice of these would-be portentous epistles—except, perhaps, the wife, who so dreaded the exhibitions of temper and the general upset that a visit from the lord and master meant.

As a rule, though these diplomatic letters did no good, they, on the other hand, did no harm. But this one to-day had arrived in time to stop Gret's proposed expedition with Robin to Quellish Harbor.

Robin Start was a youth about two years Gret's senior, and her chum as far as she indulged in such a luxury. It had come to be a settled thing—in the minds of Gret and Robin, at all events—that whenever Robin went down to the Harbor, Gret should go to. There, while Robin gathered the fruits of his marketings into the boat, she stood and gloated over the contents of the window of the one musty dry-goods store. Of course, every article contained therein was months behind any known fashion; but to Gret's heathen ideas they were models of elegance, and the contemplation of them was soul-satisfying in the extreme. And she had been intensely disgusted that

morning when so slight and transparent a thing as her father's letter had stood in the way of her visit to civilization.

"Can't think why mother takes any notice of the old letters," she observed gloomily.

"Me neither," agreed Jake, closing the oven-door upon the pies with an air of satisfaction. "Now, where do you suppose that Bill is?"

Bill—otherwise Skookum Bill—was the camp flunkey. Many of the most expressive Indian words were used in the lumbering districts, and among them skookum, signifying "big" or "fat," was considered by the men of Silway's camp as particularly appropriate to Bill, and was therefore applied without any unnecessary delay upon the first night of his arrival. Gret considered the appellation altogether too long for every-day use, and shortened it to suit herself. She slid off the table now, and, going to the door of the cook-house, called for the missing youth.

"Skook! O Skook!"

The name lent itself readily to a shout, and her voice sounded all over the foot of the cañon wherein the camp buildings stood. And in a moment, rubbing his eyes furiously, and scowling upon an unwelcome world, Skookum appeared at the door of the bunk-house, whither he had crept for a short nap.

"Pies are in," said Gret laconically. Whereupon Skookum, waking to the responsibilities of life, charged into the dining-room—otherwise the long barn-like building, with tables and benches up the middle, which did duty in that capacity.

Gret watched him disappear, and then turned her head over her shoulder to talk to Jake within the kitchen again. "Jim go down to the Harbor?" referring to the second cook, dish-washer, and general assistant to Jake.

Jake grunted in the affirmative. "Well, I 'm going home now, Jake."

"All right."

"What's the time?"

"Ten minutes to five."

"I 'll have to hurry. No sense in being in such a hurry, was there?" This to Oly, who was passing on the skid-road. Then to Jake, within the kitchen again, "Oly was so scared he was going to be late for dinner, and here 's an hour to spare. I don't suppose I 'll be late getting back, but if I should be, put me away half a pie."

"Half!" echoed Jake.

"Well, you can't spare a whole one, can you?" quickly.

"No—my gracious, no!" ejaculated the horrified cook, who had had in mind the usual allowance, that is, a quarter.

"Oh, well, half will do," said Gret gently.

Jake mumbled something which might be taken for assent. The only thing in which he could be said to be stingy was pie; and that, on account of his dislike to the making, he dealt out with a sparing hand. Gret was one of the biggest pie-eaters with whom Jake had to contend, and though she sweetly assured him from time to time that the extreme delicacy of his pastry-work alone was responsible for the abnormal appetite displayed, yet in face of the great consumption he was hardly comforted. He felt he could have done with a little less admiration.

Gret paused a second before making the proposed start for home to speak to Dick Swinton, who came up to her from off the skid.

"So you did n't manage to drown yourself this time," he said with an attempt at gruffness.

"No," with a smile and a shake of the head.

"Could n't manage it. You know, Mike Westerfeldt says we can't die before our 'appointed time.'"

"Well, I 'll tell you what," said Jake from within the cook-house, "there 's a whole lot in not being on hand when that there time arrives."

"You bet!" assented Dick with scorn.

CHAPTER II

A MYSTERIOUS FIRE

GRET scrambled hastily up the bluff steps on her way home to dinner, and as she reached the top gave a little sigh of relief. Her mother was still sitting reading on the porch, which meant that dinner was not yet on the table. Without disturbing her, Gret passed round to the back of the house and entered the kitchen. Lizzie, the gentle maid of all work, was bending critically over a pot of something that bubbled and steamed on the little range, her sleeves tucked up to the elbow, and her bristly hair almost obscuring the range from view. Gret went and stood near her.

She contemplated the damsel before her for a moment. Then, "Mike Westerfeldt 's mad at you."

Lizzie tossed her head amid the steam. "Who cares?"

"You put the currant rice on the steps outside to cool, did n't you?" changing the subject with disconcerting suddenness.

"Yes."

"Because Jack," alluding to her pet jackdaw, "is standing on the edge of the bowl eating all the currants out."

Lizzie flew to the door, and a series of flaps and squawks and hysterical chattering intimated that Jack had saved his life only by sudden flight. Presently Lizzie returned to the stove, and likewise Gret to the opening topic.

"Know what Mike 's mad at?"

"Nope," with another toss of the head.

"Well, he saw you talking to Gus Rosenberg a long time on the landing last night."

"Well, whose business is that?" demanded Lizzie airily.

"You 're his girl, and so he does n't think you ought to do it," explained Gret.

"Pshaw! Suppose because I go with him now and again I 'm never going to speak to another man?" demanded Lizzie with scorn.

"Don't know," replied Gret interested. "But Jake says you need n't mind Mike, because any kind of old girl can get a sweetheart up here."

Lizzie stared; and Gret, who had herself been struck by the many-sidedness of the observation, returned the stare with curiosity. Men with sweethearts were funny things, and girls with sweethearts even funnier. They got mad upon all kinds of unlooked-for occasions, and invariably talked without a particle of sense. And on the whole Gret considered Lizzie a very fine specimen of the genus.

After waiting a moment to see if a reply to Jake's peculiarly comforting message would be forthcoming, and receiving none, Gret went up-stairs to her little bedroom over the kitchen, where a most hasty and perfunctory dinner toilet was performed. Then she went down again, and went out into the garden to find and comfort the unfortunate Jack.

Jack, hearing the well-known voice calling, emerged cautiously from behind a bush, and came with his queer little jerky run to take his usual perch on the girl's wrist. Gret stroked the pretty blue-gray plumage, and condoled with him on his recent disaster, irrespective of the fact that she herself had been the cause of it. Her heart was very quick and tender toward anything that loved and trusted her. At the same time, if Jack had

refused to obey her call, or had in any way defied her, she would have beaten him at once.

Presently Gret put the bird down and stood frowning slightly. Of course, Lizzie had to be a little late with dinner just because she wanted to get back to the camp again quickly. She did not like eating her pie by herself; besides, Robin would surely be back from the Harbor by this, and he would just as surely stop in at the camp for dinner. She wanted to ask him if there was anything new in Dimsdale's window, and—

"Gret! Gret!" called her sister's sweet, clear voice. "Come to dinner." And Gret gladly obeyed the call.

Mrs. Silway was already seated at the table as Gret came in, and she looked up as the girl took her seat.

"Where have you been all this afternoon, Gret?"

"Down the river on a raft part of the time," replied the girl truthfully.

"After I told you not to go far from home?"

"Well, it was a hurry call, and the towboat came half the way to fetch it," explained Gret. "It was n't of any account at all."

Mrs. Silway lifted her eyebrows slightly. "Not of any account!" she repeated.

"I mean," said Gret, frowning perplexedly, "it was nothing particular to go down on that raft."

"If you adopt the camp phraseology as you are doing lately, I shall forbid you to go near it," observed Mrs. Silway quietly. She never did speak with very much emphasis, but she always meant what she said, nevertheless.

It was about the only point in her children's behavior—or rather in Gret's, for Eva was of too gentle and languid a temperament ever to offend in this line—upon which Mrs. Silway troubled herself much. She absolutely detested slang, loose phraseology, or the slightest coarseness of manner; and for the sake of her own eyes

and ears she forbade anything of the kind in her presence. Inherently refined, the careful education and breeding she had received had accentuated this trait; and now, whatever she might do or leave undone, Margaret Silway never could be anything but a lady.

Gret received her mother's threat in silence and inward horror. She registered a mental vow to so curb and watch her speech in future as to preclude any risk of its being carried out. To do the girl justice, it was very little slang that she used—marvelously little, seeing that it rang in her ears all day. But she had discovered long ago that it was a moral impossibility to talk slang up in the camp and then come home and drop it suddenly. Obviously there only remained not to talk it at all, which course Gret undertook to pursue.

Meals were always quiet and more or less silent affairs with the Silways. Between this mother and daughters, and between these sisters, there seemed to be very little in common as yet. Time, as it brought them all to adult age together, might so level things as to bring about a companionship of tastes or ideas; but at present three separate and unsympathetic entities sat about that simple table in the mighty woods of the Wishkah. Mrs. Silway was always so buried in her books and so deep in the trains of thought awakened by them as to seem removed from, and at times almost oblivious to, her surroundings; Gret was busy with her various escapades and projects, and Eva seemed at all times content with her own dreamy thoughts and maiden romances. It was an odd household, sheltering odd beings, and exemplifying a very odd state of affairs; an effect whose cause lay back through many long years and whose result was not yet all told.

When Walter Silway's father-in-law gave him the sum of money required to buy out the proprietor of a certain small logging-camp out west he did it only to be rid of

him, and not for a moment because he thought Walter would make anything of either the money or the camp. He told his daughter at the same time that when Walter had spent the money, or made away with the camp, she could come back home. But it must be alone and once for all.

The luck that had always given Silway more than he deserved, however, stood by him now. In the first place, he entered the Pacific Northwest and the lumber business just as prices were going up, the demand for lumber increasing, and facilities for shipping and transportation improving; and in the second place, knowing absolutely nothing of the lumber business himself, he had the good fortune to secure at the outset, nominally as foreman, but in reality as manager, one of the best men on the Pacific slope. Dick Swinton was very young when he came to Silway, but in the running of a logging-camp and the management of men he could give pointers to men twice his age. Those who knew anything of the matter always said that Dick made Silway's money, and not by any means Silway himself. Probably Silway would have been the last to admit anything of the kind; and Dick, if he realized the fact, was undisturbed thereat. Still, the fact remained, for fact it was.

Silway's luck was consistent all the way through. The camp that he bought without even seeing it was a good one, in a fine belt of easily purchasable timber and within touch of a serviceable river. Merely as a river the Wishkah was of no more importance than any of the other rivers intersecting the Pacific Northwest slope; but as a vehicle for logs it was as near perfection as the heart of a camp boss could wish. For thirty miles its tides were swift and strong, and it could float a raft of logs down to the mills in less time than a towboat could come to fetch it. It would have been better, perhaps, if

the spirited little river had been a bit wider. As it was, for two miles Silway's boom occupied about five-sixths of its width; and up or down the remaining sixth when the tide was low it was hard to get even a rowboat. The people who lived up above this sixth called it the Jam; and as they were all either employed at the camp or knew some one who was, they ordered their lives accordingly and made no complaint.

Things went well with Silway from first to last. He built a plain little house on the banks of the river, overlooking the boom, in which he installed his wife and the two little girls, Gret and Eva; for himself he had other plans. He began to go to the big cities, to make, as he said, timber deals; and finding life there so much more congenial to his tastes than the backwoods existence, he forthwith made it necessary to spend the greater portion of the year there. His life in the cities became one of the greatest indulgence and luxury, made all the more possible by the severely plain, almost economical, lives led by his wife and children. Two things only did he have to do in return for the generous—how generous probably only he had any idea—income and life of ease that became his. One was to leave Dick Swinton to manage the camp as he thought best, and the other was to keep his wife plentifully supplied with books. The first was easy, and the latter imperative. Though perpetually shabby and almost penniless, Margaret Silway did not complain. But she made a copious supply of books the price of unquestioning retirement. For the rest, Walter's temper and selfish ways were such that those intimately acquainted with him generally preferred his room to his company. And certainly his employees were one and all well content to accept the authority of Dick Swinton in lieu of the boss himself.

Margaret Silway lived her life in silence, glad, now

that she had come so far, to be left alone. As the two little girls grew up she devoted an hour or so to them each day, teaching them to read and write, to do a simple sum in arithmetic, and to entertain a few general ideas of geography. That was all she could manage to do. Of the manners, customs, conventionalities, and etiquette of civilized life they knew, of course, nothing; of religion they—Gret especially—knew about as much as their father's logs. Gret was no reader. She was always too busy with other matters. Or else, perhaps, down that broad avenue of enlightenment and information much stray knowledge might have filtered. But Eva, the younger by nearly two years, was already beginning to show a strong liking for books; and her bewildered little mind roamed far and wide among her mother's works of higher thought, science and ultra-refined fiction. She stayed at home and read and pondered and dreamed, while Gret roamed the brush, and the camp, and the river.

Probably the world, if it had been there to judge, would have blamed Margaret Silway for the way she brought up her girls, or rather for the way she allowed them to grow up. But there were none to know whether she was doing right or wrong. Not that it would have made the least difference in any case. Mrs. Silway was as indifferent to public opinion as she was to everything else in life but her books. If a woman so profoundly indifferent to all things surrounding her could be termed such, Margaret Silway must be called a cynic. Not the cynicism born of blasé experience, nor a cynicism adopted after a long course of self-inspection and moralizing; but the sad, unconscious cynicism that comes to a man or a woman who has lived to see every good impulse, every gentle sentiment, turn into so much mockery; who has lived to smother every fine characteristic in order to avoid going entirely to the wall.

There were other and higher courses to have taken doubtless. She might have lived for and in her children. But she was a sensitive woman, hurt to the heart's core, and she mailed herself over in self-protection. Life was a dismal failure, and she beat a retreat out of it into the domain of mere existence. The strong sense of duty and the religious fervor of her maiden days she gradually came to look upon as the merest folly of youth; and Haeckel, Schopenhauer, and others of that ilk, did—or rather ended—the rest.

When dinner was over Gret left the room, impatience in her heart, but without any undue show of haste. Once over the edge of the bluff, however, and she flew down the steps, springing into the boat with such force that it was almost half-way across the stream before she had lifted an oar. She ran like a deer into the camp, and was greeted with a chorus of shouts as she entered the dining-room.

"Beef 's all gone, Gret!"

Gret looked unconcerned. "Pie is n't," she observed, her eyes wandering down the row of faces in search of Robin's.

He was down at the other end of the table, looking expectantly toward her; and taking her half-pie from the meekly-waiting Skookum, Gret went down and climbed into a seat by Robin's side. She took up a fork, and signed to Skookum to bring her a cup of coffee. Then she turned her attention to Robin, who, in view of the fact that he had barely found time to glance in Dimsdale's window, was slightly apprehensive.

"Well—have a good time?"

"Fine," said Robin bravely; and then, knowing full well what would come next, "there 's a new white dress put up in the window."

"What kind?" demanded Gret.

"Oh, awfully pretty," declared Robin, with praiseworthy enthusiasm, seeing that he really did not know whether the article in question were a street-dress or a nightgown; "with frills all round."

Gret fixed him with a stern eye. "All round what?"

"Oh—the bottom, of course," explained Robin, floundering a little at first and recovering with a jerk.

Gret regarded him with steady scorn for a moment. "Don't believe you know anything about it," she said with conviction.

"Don't I? Well, wait till you go and see for yourself!" retorted Robin.

"Of course. That 's what I 'll have to do." And Gret turned her attention to the pie with an air of disgust.

Robin hastened to make amends, and to show that, though uncommunicative on one point, he was not on all. "Jack Gradel was down at the Harbor," he said quickly. "And what do you think?"

Gret paused in the act of lifting a piece of pie to her mouth. Plainly she was listening.

"He bought Mary Anselm a scarf-pin," concluded Robin impressively.

"What kind?"

"Large blue stone, set all round with gold," replied Robin, partially closing his eyes and mentally regarding with admiration the jewel in question.

"Blue glass," said Gret summarily.

"No, it was n't glass," replied Robin thoughtfully. "It might have been china. You know, Jack says Mary 's his girl, and he 's going to marry her soon."

"Humph! His old Uncle Gradel will see about that," said Gret with a comically worldly-wise air. Jack was an adopted child, and never had boy a sterner foster-parent.

"Oh, I don't know," said Robin with feeling. He was

situated in somewhat similar position himself, only that his uncle really was a blood relative. "His uncle knows that the fellow must marry some day. Suppose my uncle will stop me when I—?"

"You bet," responded Gret with more brevity than elegance.

"Well, you 'll see," said the boy hotly.

"Oh, yes—if I live long enough," in the peculiarly summary way that was already beginning to be characteristic of her.

Robin looked sulky; at the same time in his bright restless brown eyes a faint humorous twinkle appeared. He was just thinking if Gret only knew all! Feeling that Jack, in the possession of a girl, had got considerably ahead of him in that race for manhood which both were running, Robin had seized on the absent and unconscious Gret to fill the vacancy, though in his inmost heart greatly doubting Gret's attitude when he should announce his desire. A heated discussion upon the merits of their respective lady-loves had then ensued, in which Robin, from sheer volubility, had come off victor.

It was a good thing for what was left of Robin's peace of mind that Gret was no mind-reader. As it was, she finished her pie all unconscious of her new dignity, and then went over to where Jake and Mike Westerfeldt were holding council. Robin had been her companion from infancy; he was always ready to follow where she led—or to be more particular, to risk his neck where she risked hers. At the same time she considered his mind and intellect very poor affairs.

Gret went home early, going straight to her room, as was generally her way. To-night, however, though she went to her room, she did not go to bed. Instead she sat by the window, looking thoughtfully down the roof of the lean-to wash-house. How many hundred times, in

summer, when the nights were hot and she could not sleep, had she slipped down that roof and off into the whispering mystery of the brush, into the electric hush of the night!

Breakfast in the Silway household was not until about nine o'clock, and before attending it Gret generally went over to the camp for advice as to the probable events of the day—whether, for example, there was any likelihood of a raft going down, or whether logs were going to be let out of the slough and taken up into the boom.

This morning, as she approached the camp, she noticed Jake and Oly standing by the door of the cook-house, deep in some discussion or other. As Gret drew near they ceased talking, and stared at the girl.

Quite unembarrassed, Gret approached, and returned the stare in kind. Finally Oly spoke.

"Heard the news, Gret?"

Gret looked slightly scornful. "How could I have heard any news when I've only just this moment come?"

"Thought perhaps you might have seen somebody on the landing," said Oly, shuffling. "What do you think? Widow McCarty's gulch is all in flames. That onery fellow won't get no more logs off'n it, sure." And Oly cast a hasty glance at Gret before lowering his eyes to the ground.

"Serves him right," remarked that young lady unfeelingly.

"Can't think how a fire could start like that," went on Oly blandly. "Course, it's been a dry spring. But then—fires don't never start this time of the year."

"Providence, I expect," suggested Gret serenely.

"Good thing," remarked Jake, speaking for the first time, "that Providence hit upon a time when the wind was blowing off your father's timber."

"Is n't it?" agreed Gret affably.

But she returned Jake's gaze with a stony, expressionless stare, and presently that gentleman retired within the cook-house—whether to cover his embarrassment or to laugh, cannot be recorded.

CHAPTER III

HOW JACK AND MARY WERE MARRIED

GRET stood on the bluff one afternoon in spring, watching Robin Start's fourth attempt to hit the floating landing. A warm March had melted the snows, and the little Wishkah was full to overflowing. The logs rose and fell and strained within the boom, and the landings up and down the river had almost reached the limit allowed by the builders.

The past year had made quite a noticeable change in Gret, though probably those that were with her day by day did not realize it. It had added about two inches to her height, and the same to her length of skirt; three or four inches more to the already fine breadth of chest, and five or six years to the keen, peculiar mind.

She watched Robin land with a thoughtful narrowing of the eyes. By the way he approached her up the bank she knew he had either some news to impart which he did not expect would be acceptable, or a request to prefer of whose fulfilment he was in doubt. In any case Gret was prepared to be contrary. She had badly wanted to go up to the Forks herself that morning, but had not been able to; and she did not believe in hoarding up a disappointment or an annoyance. It lost most of its sting when passed on.

Robin reached the top of the bluff, and threw himself on the mossy sward. "Current's awfully strong," he remarked. "Tide's not turned, either."

"Yes—just," scanning the water line round the landing. "And then the river 's very full, of course."

"Oh, has it turned, sure?" queried Robin quickly, raising himself from the leaning attitude. "Oh!" Some thought was evidently held back from expression. Then he looked up over his shoulder at Gret. "Guess what Mary Anselm told Jack last night."

"How could I?" demanded Gret, disgusted with the magnitude of the suggestion.

"Well, she told him she was n't going to work out any more. She was just going to marry Dave Voyt, and—and do nothing, you know."

Gret looked unconvinced. "Has Dave ever asked her?"

"Oh my, yes. Many a time. But think of marrying a man like that—legs all shapes."

"Earns four dollars a day, though," observed Gret dryly.

"Yes—that 's all Mary 's thinking about, of course," said Robin, with all a man's contempt. "But—just think! She 's been going with Jack for nearly three years now. And then all the presents he 's given her." And quite overcome for the moment by contemplation of the absent Mary's mercenary spirit, Robin looked with moody, disgusted eyes upon the swollen waters of the Wishkah.

Gret said nothing. She glanced critically at Robin, and then waited for the further communication that she knew was to come. Suddenly Robin's countenance brightened.

"Well, say, do you know what I told Jack I 'd do if I was he?"

"No."

"Why, I told him that if it was me, I 'd marry her right away myself. Darned if I 'd let any fellow get ahead of me with my girl."

"Yes." Gret laughed. "His old Father Gradel would show him."

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"Well, I think he 's going to do it just the same," said Robin exultantly. "He 's going down to the Harbor to-day, and I 'm going with him. Then I 've told him we 'll just jump on the boat, go up to Montyville and get the license, and hurry back. Then to-morrow he can persuade Mary to go down to the Harbor with him—and that 's all there 'll be to it."

"Oh, no—not much," said Gret mockingly, after a moment's pause. She had taken due note of the point Robin had come to make. He wanted to go down to the Harbor without her.

"Of course not—really," agreed Robin gleefully, clasping his knees tightly. "The old man will turn them out just as soon as they strike the door."

"Well?" interrogated Gret scornfully. "What then? Jack will have to go to work in the camp or somewhere, and he 'll get some kind of a shack for Mary to keep house in—like Ruby Laport and Tom Stevens, and Nelly McGrevor and What-'s-his-name. What fun will that be for you?"

But Robin refused to have his gleeful anticipations dashed, and presently departed to find Jack in a state of mild excitement that Gret was far from sharing. She herself strolled up to the camp after a while, and there got into an argument with Jake Connor on a man's moral right to be allowed to make a fool of himself if he chooses. Gret had in mind Jack Gradel when she started the discussion, but long before the end of the argument had forgotten the cause of it; and when at last she went home, the affair had long ago been relegated to a dim place among the insignificant details of the day.

So slightly did she think of the matter, and so far was it from uppermost in her mind, that she was honestly astonished when on the following morning Robin stopped

her on the board-walk and excitedly informed her that he had "got it."

"Eh?" said Gret blankly.

"Why, the license—he got it," repeated Robin with indignant emprossement.

"Oh!" With an air of indifferent enlightenment. "Well, that 's nothing. Anybody could get that."

"Oh, no, you can't. He had to say they were both twenty-one," replied Robin promptly. "He 's going to take Mary down to the Harbor to-morrow."

"Very likely she won't have him after all the bother," surmised Gret affably.

"Oh, yes, she will," confidently. "I don't believe she 's at all stuck on the idea of marrying Dave Voyt really."

"Well," shrugging her shoulders. "And are you going down to the Harbor again, too?"

"Yes; but not with them exactly. Jack knows where to find me when he wants me. Don't you want to come too, Gret?"

"Nope," decidedly. "Do you mean, to see them get married? That 's nothing to see. Jim Ericson was judge for a while—no, justice they called him—and he told me how it was done."

"How was it done?" inquired Robin with interest.

"Oh, easy. Jim said the first time two people came to him to be married he did n't know exactly what to do. He wondered what you had to say to make people married. He never had been married himself, and did n't know. So he just said, 'Do you want this man for a husband?' 'Yes.' 'And do you want this woman?' 'Yes.' 'All right. You 're man and wife. Two dollars.'"

"I don't believe it 's done as suddenly as that," said Robin indignantly.

"'T is, too," declared Gret. "How much longer do you want it?"

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"Oh, well, they may do it that way, but it is n't proper," said Robin unconvinced. "Any kind of old man can be justice of the peace if the people get in and elect him—whether he knows how to marry people, and do things, or not. Ericson did n't know how to do it; that 's all."

"Perhaps not. But what 's it matter? You 're married. That 's the main thing," observed the practical Gret.

"Oh, yes—of course," allowed Robin unwillingly. "But you don't get married very often, and you don't want it done all kerwhop like that. Getting married is the main fun."

"Is it?" Gret glanced with almost a woman's mockery over the tall, broad-shouldered figure before her. "You seem to know all about it."

Robin flushed slightly. Like all of his fair coloring, he was quick to anger, and Gret annoyed him a hundred times a day by her apparently light estimate of his years, which were nineteen, and his personality, which he fondly imagined to be a very weighty affair. Gret saw the flush and paused, laughing, as she started on her way up the board-walk again.

"Go and see them married," she advised. "Then you 'll know how to go through your own part when the time comes—if it ever does come."

Robin looked after her for a moment, an almost spiteful expression in his eyes; then he continued on his way down to the landing and the boat. And Gret went on her way, too, in the opposite direction, amused, until something else claimed her wide-open attention. She stopped to investigate a yellow-jackets' nest between the two boards of the walk, which some of the camp boys had burned out the night before. Several of the vicious little insects still flew back and forth from out of the charred

and blackened entrance to the nest, and Gret saw that the job was not well done.

Two or three feet below her, on either side of the little trestle-way on which she walked, stretched the marsh, delta-shaped, and lying at the foot of the great cañon from the sides of which her father was at present reaping golden harvests. Her eyes wandered in great, though perhaps unconscious, love over the dense growth that was already beginning to show green above the treacherous and many-hued marsh grasses; and then wandered farther on to the mountain-tops and the jagged line of pines that the clear March air threw up in sharp relief. Many people love nature in so many words—better say, perhaps, they admire her in that way. Others love her from the bottom of their hearts, all unconsciously, as the animals do. And so it was with Gret. It was the breath of her nostrils; and yet she would have been puzzled to have fittingly described any one of the scenes and aspects that her strange little soul adored.

A chain of logs, hauled by the noisy donkey-engine, was coming down the skid-road as Gret stepped off the trolley-way, and she gave a short petulant sigh. She had not known the logs were coming down so early or she would have been up on the felling grounds long ago. For Gret dearly loved coming down the skid-road on the logs, a feat of balancing which only an experienced camp hand can perform, and one in which, next to seeing her on a raft, Dick Swinton hated exceedingly to see her indulge. And not without some reason, for a fall from the logs while on the skid-road would almost inevitably mean a broken limb. These roads vary in height, some being almost level with the ground; but in Silway's camp the road from the foot of the cañon to the slough was four or five feet high, and when added to this was the height of the descending timber—anywhere from four to six

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feet—a tumble down to the marsh below was a serious affair.

Gret sat down on the platform of the donkey and watched the string of logs, like a giant caterpillar, come wobbling and wriggling down the uneven bed of the road. On the last log was the fine, athletic figure of the overseer, and Gret watched his progress critically. She counted Dick next to herself in the balancing act. Then she sat and watched the work of dumping the logs into the slough, laughing at each tremendous splash just as she had laughed a hundred times before and would, probably, a hundred times again.

Presently all was done, and for a time the noisy donkey was still. The skid-men stood about for a moment before going back to the slide, and Dick came and seated himself near Gret.

"Got ahead of you this time, Gret," he observed affably.

"That 's what you did," agreed that young lady with equal amiability. "What are you going to do now, Dick?"

"Going back up," surveying her with his head resting on one hand.

"Another chain coming down?"

"Not yet awhile."

"Could n't say when to save your neck, could you?" mockingly.

"Could n't say when to save yours," good-humoredly.

"Don't care. I 'll be Johnny-on-the-spot when it starts off, just the same," with a confident nod.

"That so? Well, pretty soon you 'll have to be a good little girl and stay home."

"Why?" interested at once.

"Because your father 's coming."

"When?" quickly, knowing that Dick's information on this point was always second to none.

"Some time this month."

"Will he be here long, do you suppose?" inquired Gret dejectedly.

"Oh, a week or two, I guess. I've got another timber deal on for him. Old Robnike's claim, back of the cañon, has some fine timber on it, and he's willing to sell."

"Well, why don't you bring the deal through yourself, Dick, just as you did the last?" inquired Gret coaxingly.

"Too much kicking," replied Dick quietly. "The last deal turned out fine, but at first the boss kicked like a bay steer about it."

"Pshaw! What's his kicking amount to?" retorted Gret with fine contempt.

"Nothing. Only I'm not taking any."

Gret picked up a piece of bark and nibbled away industriously at it, a cloud gathering on her face. Dick glanced at her slyly and smiled. It was not often his turn, but when it did come he was not above teasing her.

"So you'll have to be good for two whole weeks—perhaps more," he observed with a great show of satisfaction.

Gret looked at him; she narrowed her eyes as if taking the perspective of a dim future, and drew one of the deep breaths that were a trick of hers.

"Yes," she said quietly, and without any apparent show of irritation. "Yes—I'll stay at home and fold my hands as I'm expected to do. But not for long—not for many more times. Mother is getting so that she kicks all the time about my being out and about, and father, when he's home, makes her worse. What do they suppose I'm going to do—sit on the doorstep all my life? But don't you forget—there's a way out of it all, and I'm going to find it. I never sat down and thought and thought and thought about a thing yet but it came to me."

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"Of course, there 's a way—a natural one that 'll come itself," said Dick, not at all pleased with the drift of her thoughts. "You 'll grow up pretty soon now and get married."

Gret's clean-cut lips curled. "Marry what?"

"A man, of course."

The girl glanced at him long and severely. "You 're too smart for every-day use," she remarked witheringly, and then jumped off the platform and walked coolly away.

Dick watched her out of sight as she walked toward the camp, and then went back up to the grounds, vexed to think he had, merely to gratify a desire to tease, awakened in the girl's mind a very threatening train of thought.

Meanwhile Gret reached the camp, and entered the cook-house. Jake was seated on a box, a chopping-bowl between his knees, and vigorously pounding away.

"What 's that?" inquired Gret abruptly.

"Dry hash—will be," replied Jake, with a covert glance at the somewhat sinister face of the girl.

Gret smiled. "I bet it 'll be dry!" She sat on the usual corner of the table, and having in mind what, out of a sort of scornful curiosity, she had come intending to say, she looked at Jake intently. "Say, Jake."

"Yes. What 'll I say?"

"Wait till I tell you. Say—what do you think 's going to come of me?"

Jake stopped chopping. "How?"

"Did n't you hear me? I said what was going to become of me?"

"Well—" Jake looked perplexed. "In what way?"

"Any way. How stupid you are!" impatiently. "Altogether, I mean. Suppose I 'll always go on living like this?"

"Oh! Why, of course not," promptly. "You 'll grow up soon."

"No!" sarcastically. "You don't say! What else will I do?"

"Get married, I suppose," went on Jake, cautiously.

"Marry *what?*" inquired Gret with the sardonic air of one who has laid a trap and now waits for the victim to fall in.

"A man, to be sure. What else?"

Gret looked positively enraged. She glared at the perplexed Jake for a second or so, and then, the combined intellect of Silway's camp proving suddenly too much for her equanimity, jumped up and walked suddenly out of the cook-house.

Jake was altogether staggered at this unlooked-for effect of his words, and wondered vaguely wherein he had blundered. However, he put away a full half of her favorite pie, and looked to the evening to solve the problem. But Gret did not put in an appearance at all. For the rest of that day she was seen no more of man.

Robin came into the camp late in the evening, seeking and apparently very anxious to find her. But, being informed by Jake that she was in a "mighty queer cue" when last seen, he abandoned the idea of going up to the house in search of her, and decided to wait for the morrow with what patience he could.

When that auspicious morn arrived, Robin arose very early, hurried over his work, went about a little expedition that he had in mind, and then rushed down to the camp to look for Gret. She was not there—had not been seen that morning, Jake informed him, though he had sent a message to her to come and go with him to see some bear-cubs; so Robin started off for the Silway house. Half-way down the trolley-way, however, he met the august little lady sauntering toward him.

Gret's irritability of the day before had melted. Indeed, her equanimity this morning was almost exasperat-

ing—to Robin in his present state of mind, at all events.

"They 've done it—they 're married!" he shouted, while yet fully fifty yards distant.

"They have?" Gret condescended to be interested, and, what was still more important, allowed her interest to be seen. "What did they do? Where did they go?"

"Went home as large as life," replied Robin with sparkling eyes. "Jack said the best way was to brave it out, and go home and see if it would work."

"Well, are they still there, do you suppose?"

"I don't know," mysteriously. "I 've been up and looked at the cabin this morning, and—"

"It 's still there," concluded Gret with a soft laugh. "No signs of a storm—roof on and all complete?"

Robin nodded, with a grin of delight. "Yes. No trunks standing out in the yard, and no dead bodies."

"Well, why did n't you tell Jack to come and tell you how it all turned out?" inquired the practical Gret.

"Did. And he said he would," replied Robin quickly. "But, you bet, if things turn out badly he won't. Or, if he does, he won't tell the truth."

"Of course not," agreed Gret. "Well!" She half turned to continue on her way up to the camp, then suddenly thought of something. "Oh, what did Mary have on to be married in?"

"She had on that blue-and-white striped waist," answered Robin, thankful to have observed that much.

"What else?"

"Oh—hat and skirt, and—" vaguely.

Gret looked scornful, but knew from long experience how useless it was to try to extract anything more definite. Robin had all a man's unobservance of details in a woman's dress—any other than Gret, that is. With almost all the articles of her wardrobe he was painfully familiar,

having taken part in the long struggle previous to the obtaining of each, from its secret selection down in the Harbor store, through all the stages of alternate hope and despair, to the final state of doting pride consequent upon possession. So Gret abandoned that particular branch of inquiry, and sought to satisfy her curiosity upon another.

"Was Mary scared when she was going to be married?"

"Oh, yes," with a smile of pleased recollection. "Jack had to just pull her into Justice Hendricks's office, and I gave a push behind and she went in suddenly. And then she never looked up the whole time—only kept on saying, 'Yes, sir; yes, sir,' to all he asked her."

"Well, there was nothing in it—being married—was there?" inquired Gret confidently.

"No-o, not much. Still, there was more than you said. He read quite a rigmarole out of a book."

"Oh, I see," disgustedly. "That 's how he did it. Looked in an Inquire-within to see how it was done, I bet. It 's not so long since Hendricks used to work in the mill at Sowasco. I can remember it. What does he know about anything?"

"Oh, he 's not so bad," remonstrated Robin. "He was foreman at the mill, you know. He 's saved lots of money, too. He 's making quite a street in front of his house."

"Oh, he 's all right in one way," allowed Gret indifferently. "But it seems so silly for a plain man to marry people."

"He can't until he 's a justice," responded Robin. "What kind of a man do you want to do the marrying?"

Gret had no very distinct ideas on the subject really. Her brain held a dim image of some being of colossal dignity and ponderous weight of utterance, but a being all too dim to outline in words, and she passed by the inquiry.

"Well, I must be going," calmly. "Jake and I are going up to Shoney's to see the bear-cubs. Go and see if you can't find Jack, and then come and tell me what he says."

"Where will I find you?" inquired Robin anxiously, as the girl turned away.

"If I 'm not in the camp, I 'll be home," over her shoulder.

She began to walk briskly toward the camp, and Robin strolled with undecided step toward the river. He reached the bend in the trolley-way and looked lazily up the river past the alders that lined the slough; then he wheeled round and shouted loudly to the retreating Gret. Gret paused impatiently, and then, judging by Robin's excited gesticulations that something of unusual interest was approaching down the river, ran lightly back, catching up with that youth by the landing. A boat containing the—at present—all-important Jack was coming down the stream, and the two watched his approach with impatience. On his face, as he got near them, they could trace a sort of subdued elation, and the two cast a quick glance of surprise at one another as they waited.

"Well?" they inquired in chorus as the boat grazed the landing.

"Well, what?" with a provoking assumption of ignorance.

"Oh, go on," shouted Robin. "Tell us how it all went off."

"Fine! Could n't be better," airily. "Mary 's up at the cottage doing the work, and I 'm going down to the Harbor with eggs and to get corn-meal." And Jack watched the astonished faces of his listeners with keen appreciation.

"Then—then your old man did n't kick at all," gasped Robin.

"Tell us," demanded Gret, giving the side of the boat a kick that nearly sent Jack into the river.

"All right," laughing. "I 'll tell you just how it all went. You know," with a glance at Robin, "we was late for supper, and when we got to the door the old man was sitting smoking, waiting for me to come and help get supper. The minute he looked up," and Jack lifted his hand excitedly, "I knew he guessed what we 'd done. So I just said 'Dad, we got married.' He took the pipe out of his mouth. 'You did?' he says. And he pointed toward my bedroom. 'Well, pack your duds and skip.' I knew it was n't any good saying anything, so I went to my room; but I gave Mary the wink to try and say something to smooth him. She could n't think of nothing to say, though, and stood looking round the kitchen helpless like. Finally it struck her that it was tough on the old man to have waited for his supper and then get none, and she says, awful gentle, 'Shan't I get your supper, sir, while Jack 's packing?' 'I don't care what you do,' says Dad. So Mary goes to work without a word. There was n't any bread, only stale old stuff, and Mary made hot biscuits in no time, and you know she 's a crackerjack at cooking. When supper was all ready she called me, and I came and sat down without a word, too. After supper Mary cleared the table and washed the dishes, all quiet and gentle, and it seemed so nice for me and the old man not to have to pitch in and do it ourselves. And I believe he thought so too, on the quiet. Well, so I just quietly took my pipe and went and sat alongside Dad, like we always do before we go to bed, and he did n't say a word for the longest while. Then he said, quite cool, 'I see corn-meal 's out again.' And I said, 'Well, I can bring it up with me in the morning. There 's enough eggs to be taken down anyway.' And he did n't say no, I was n't to, or anything about it. And this morning Mary got up and

got the breakfast, and I started down here, and the old man went to the potato-field just the same as if we 'd been like this for years. And that 's all there was to it," concluded Jack, his eyes sparkling with delight.

There was a moment's silence, and then Robin spoke. "Gee whiz! I never thought the old man would take it like that," he said truthfully enough.

"Me neither," said Jack candidly. "Although I knew there 's never no telling what he 'll do. Always does just what you don't expect him to do."

"And so now you and Mary will just go on living quietly there with him?" inquired Gret. "I suppose you 're awfully tickled."

"You bet! And by and by we 'll get the old man to make the cottage a little larger," said Jack enthusiastically. "I was awful scared at it—getting married, you know. But now I 'm glad I tackled it." And he beamed gratefully on Robin, who did not, however, look exactly as gratified as might be expected. "Well, now I want to get my eggs down before Max does—get a better price. S' long!"

And bestowing a nod that might have contained the least little bit of condescension upon his two friends, the newly married man rowed off, a new energy in his bearing, a new purpose giving power to his stroke.

Robin glanced scornfully after him. "Humph! Very anxious about the price of eggs all of a sudden. Had n't used to care about anything before, except how long he could stay away."

Gret burst out laughing. Whatever else had failed, she had had her quota of amusement. Robin's face alone for the last few minutes had been a treat.

Gret went up to see the cubs, and on the way talked the affair over more fully with the erudite Jake, gaining much light on a hitherto obscure subject. Marriage to

her had always seemed one of the most idiotic of the many freaks of custom to be observed abroad among mankind. It was an arrangement, as far as she could see, whereby people quarreled incessantly who would not otherwise have done so, and by which people were kept together when often apparently longing to be apart. But Jake explained the realities that underlay the superficial aspect of the case. He pointed out that marriage was the proper goal of every right-minded woman, providing, as it did, a home, and emancipation from that thralldom of servitude to which, unless particularly fortunate, all unmarried women come; and showed how the man instantly became of certain value to, and a part and parcel of, the community to which he belonged, settling down, acquiring property, and in due time becoming sheriff, mayor, or something of that kind. Jake declared an unmarried man to be a rudderless ship which reached no port, amiably inviting his companion to look upon himself as witness and example to the truth of the saying.

There was no mention in Jake's discourse of affection or sentiment as a possible motive for the joining together of any two people, which was just as well. As it was his statements were unreservedly accepted by Gret as logical and conclusive; any leaning toward sentiment might have resulted in the throwing overboard by that eminently practical young person of the whole argument. For though sentiment is commonly accepted as the common heritage of youth, there was very little of it shown in the lives of the dwellers on the Wishkah. Ranchers principally, except for a few loggers' families, and for the most part of Scandinavian nationality, they married young and settled down to their humdrum lives with a stolidity that effectually hid—if there was any to hide—the sentiment that provoked marriage. It seemed for the most part a purely business arrangement, necessary to the

securing of a home on the one hand and a housekeeper on the other. Quite frequently, as Gret had observed, these marriages were a sad failure as far as temperament and any attempt at unity and comfort were concerned. So, in the light both of her observations and her reasoning powers, Gret found Jake's theories good as far as they went.

Being clear now on all the main points of the marriage question, Gret rather wished to see Mary and compare personal experience with theory. Her wish did not extend to the point of going up to the Gradel cottage; but when one afternoon she met Mary face to face—or rather boat to boat—on the river, she was quick to row up and greet her.

Gret had known Mary all her life; and though they were really of very different stations in life, yet neither had the faintest realization of this difference, and were, moreover, among a people that took very little notice of it. Consequently they were perfectly familiar with each other, though never chummy. But this was merely because a girl of Mary's temperament never could be any companion for a girl like Gret.

Gret's greeting was brief and to the point. "Hallo! Well, how do you like it?"

"Fine," responded Mary enthusiastically, at no loss on account of the vague nature of Gret's inquiry. "Oh, Gret, it's awful fun being married. You should do it."

Gret passed the advice over without comment, and waited for further revelations.

"You know," went on the satisfied Mary, "there's only just a bit of work in that cottage, and nobody to tell me how it ought to be done, and when I should get through, and all that. And then I can get plenty of money, too."

"How?" inquired Gret instantly.

"Why, they give me money to go down and get things

for the house—for cooking and all that,” explained Mary.

“Well, but you have to get them—the things,” demurred Gret, only half seeing the point.

“Oh, of course,” airily; “but not all, I say. I can get along with half of what they used to cook up and waste.” Mary leaned across the boat and spoke confidentially. “I’ve very nearly got enough already to get that ring out of the store—you know, the circle with the opal stones.”

Gret nodded.

“Is old Daddie Gradel nice to you?” she inquired after a moment.

“Just as lovely as he can be,” answered Mary. “You know, he don’t talk very much to anybody, but he’s all right to me just the same. Never kicks about anything. I can go out when I like, and come in when I get ready, so long’s meals are on time. That’s all I need to bother my head about.”

Gret nodded thoughtfully, her eyes on Mary’s face. It would have been no good that young lady’s giving a long tale of victory if her face had in any way belied her words. But it did not. Her eyes were bright and enthusiastic, and her whole demeanor full of hope and satisfaction, and Gret knew that she was shamming nothing, hiding nothing.

Presently, after a few minutes more of chatter, Mary made to row on. “Else I’ll be late to get supper,” she explained.

“Then you’d soon see whether there was any one to tell you about anything or not,” observed Gret with slight sarcasm.

“Oh, I don’t know,” lightly. “Only it’s no good making the old man mad at the start.” And Mary dipped oars and went on her way up the stream again.

Gret rowed on her way also, pondering many things

as she went. Evidently Mary had done a pretty good thing for herself, and perhaps Dick and Jake had not been quite such fools when they said she would grow up some day and marry—a man.

CHAPTER IV

GRET REBELS

MR. SILWAY came down, as Dick Swinton had predicted, and reposed with more than usual discomfort within the bosom of his family. Coming from the ordered regularity of a first-class hotel, and from the bustle and civilization of a big city, he was struck afresh and forcibly with the air of stagnation and neglect pervading the quiet house on the bluff that he dignified by the name of home. Not dreaming, of course, of taking the blame, or any share of it, for this state of affairs, he promptly bestowed it upon his wife. Or rather, he attempted to bestow it, opening the campaign with Gret.

That young lady had received a command from her mother to stay at home during her father's visit, as there would inevitably be quite sufficient unpleasantness within that time without any contributions on her part. And receiving it, she had quite intended to obey. But somehow or other, after the first three days, it had seemed a morally impossible undertaking; never had so many entrancing projects presented themselves, and never had the camp seemed so absorbingly dear. And it happened several times that, slipping hastily and secretly back from various expeditions, Gret ran into her father without being able to give an altogether satisfactory account of her absence. Walter Silway, observing the migratory habits of his elder daughter, decided that something must be done at once—by some one else.

"Why do you let that girl run all over the place as she does?" he demanded of his wife one day. His tone was magisterial, and his manner righteous. He had just been endeavoring to extract from Gret an account of her doings since the morning, when he last remembered to have seen her, discovering with rising irritation that he might just as well try to extract information from one of his logs.

Mrs. Silway put down her book, placing it carefully face downward on her knee so as to readily find her place again on resuming it. "What did you say? I was hardly listening."

Mr. Silway felt that the magisterial effect was marred, and was further irritated.

"Can't you find duties for Gret to do about the house, instead of having her romping over the camps as she does?"

"Oh, no; there 's nothing for her to do about the house," replied Mrs. Silway with unconcern. "Lizzie attends to all that sort of thing perfectly."

"Well, she ought to have something to do," retorted Silway, his sentences, as was usual when his temper began to rise, ending in a high falsetto. "It 's preposterous the way she 's growing up."

"Indeed, I quite agree with you," assented Mrs. Silway serenely. "That 's why I 'm so amazed that you don't send her to some good school. She ought to have gone away at least two years ago."

"Away—send her away to school!" Silway glared at his unmoved wife. "What stuff you talk! That would cost hundreds of dollars a year. How do you suppose I could afford that as business is at present?"

"Easily. By staying at home a little more, or at all events by staying at a moderate-priced hotel instead of the swellest in the city, and by running with a set of men

nearer your own station in life instead of a set of men—single men—whose incomes go into the tens of thousands,” explained Mrs. Silway coolly.

Walter Silway sat and stared in silence for a moment, wrath mingled with amaze. He had never credited his bookish wife with any very clear business views, or any particularly lucid ideas as to his income and its possibilities. Moreover, he had certainly never dreamed but that his artistic account of the strenuous business life he was always supposed to lead had been accepted without the faintest questioning. He was decidedly staggered, and for a wonder did not think of arguing or denying. It hardly seemed of use in the face of the undisturbed woman before him, with her infinite quiet contempt. So, instead of replying to her obnoxious statement of possibilities, he branched off in another direction.

“It ’s ridiculous to send girls to expensive colleges, unless—unless you want them to follow some profession or to teach,” he observed with an air of authority. “You could educate them quite sufficiently yourself at home. You have a fine education. They won’t need any more than you have.”

“That is an open question,” replied Mrs. Silway evenly. “However, we won’t argue the point. I don’t intend to try. It ’s not necessary. You ’re well able to do something for Gret. I ’ve done my share; now do yours. I don’t suppose you will; and I ’m aware that your neglect of duty will not condone mine. But when the reckoning comes, I ’m willing to take my share of the punishment—knowing that you will get yours.” And for a moment the feelings long since smothered and laid away in her soul awoke and gleamed from out the cold, serene eyes.

Her husband stared across at her again, startled once more in spite of himself. It was so rarely now that he could rouse her to any extent, nag though he might, and

frequently did, for an hour at a time. He particularly disliked the exhibition of feeling when made, however, and when he began again it was in a wailing, reproachful falsetto.

"There you are, you see. That 's the spirit you 're infusing into these girls. No wonder they 're obstinate and wild!"

But Mrs. Silway had taken up her book again; and though her lord and master discoursed at full length for twenty minutes or more, she heard him not, or, if she did, gave no sign.

Though when speaking of his offspring Silway always referred to them in plural terms, in reality he had no misgivings whatever concerning Eva. That gentle, dreamy-eyed maiden was generally to be seen either reading under the big fir, petting the irascible jackdaw, or lying on the bluff gazing up and down the river in solitary content. Plainly she was never going to give any trouble. Of course, Gret, so much the stronger personality, could have wielded unbounded influence over the younger girl had she chosen; but Mr. Silway was pleased to observe that she did not seem to so choose. Eva adored her sister, but her adoration took the form of hanging like one fascinated about that enterprising individual when at home; she never attempted to follow her or share in any of her exploits. For one thing, Eva was physically incapable of sharing to any great extent in Gret's life. Though not exactly delicate, she was cast in a rather fragile mold, and could not ever hope to emulate the lithe and tireless Gret. And then again her inclinations did not lie in anything like the same directions; her temperament was languid, and she was almost painfully shy. To go about among the men as Gret did would have been torture to her. But she dearly loved Gret for all that, considering her the very flower of maidenly perfection. However, at

present Mr. Silway was not borrowing trouble beyond the fact that Gret was flying helter-skelter over the country, holding his name up to the public notice and himself as a father up to possible criticism.

He tried calling Gret to book in the matter, but with no perceptible success. Rising unexpectedly early one morning, he encountered that young woman slipping home from a visit to the camp.

"Where have you been?" he demanded, bringing the girl to a standstill before him.

"Up to the camp," replied Gret laconically. She was tired of prevaricating and evading, and decided to see what straightforward confession would produce.

"What have you been doing there? Don't you know the camp's no place for a girl your age?" inquired Mr. Silway sternly.

Gret made no reply. She considered this statement of her father's as purely a matter of opinion.

"It's terrible the way your mother allows you to run wild," he went on. "Why don't you have more respect for yourself, and behave like other young ladies?"

"How do they behave?" inquired Gret with strictly impartial interest, wondering at the same time, with a sort of grim humor, whether she could justly lay claim to the title of young lady.

"They stay at home and conduct themselves with dignity," said her father impressively.

Gret burst out laughing. She could not help it. "Is that all they do all their lives?" she asked.

And then the laugh died away, and she watched curiously for her father's answer. Perhaps he, too, would tell her that she would one day grow up and marry—a man. But he did not. He frowned at the display of levity, coming as it did on the top of so much impressiveness on his part.

"They find duties round their homes," he said then, rather at a loss himself to provide a suitable program on such short notice. "And they spend a portion of their time trying to improve themselves."

"How do they do that?" demanded Gret, not to be put off with vague explanations. "How would I do it?"

"Read and study," said Mr. Silway, who did not, by the way, read one book a year himself, intrusting the broadening of his mind solely to the newspapers. "There is no better education for the man than reading."

"No sense in reading what others imagine people doing, when you can go out and see for yourself what they do do," observed Gret scornfully.

"You need not take up fiction if it does not appeal to you," said her father readily. "There are histories, books of travel—in fact, books of instruction on any subject one might like to take up."

"Can't understand all those unless you've been taught," responded Gret, with more or less truth. "And there's nothing for me to do about the house, anyway. Lizzie does it all, and she would not let me bother round her. What should I do with myself all the days and weeks and months?" indignation creeping into her voice. "Sit with my hands folded?"

"Other girls find means of employing themselves quietly at home, and so can you," replied her father evasively. "At all events, understand me once for all: I won't have you flying all over the woods and camps."

Gret made no reply, but she looked her father in the eyes for a moment. Her own eyes widened with the flame of an indomitable spirit, and she drew one of those deep breaths that actually seemed to swell her whole inches in height and breadth. Then she turned and walked away, leaving Mr. Silway divided between anger and amazement. It had suddenly been revealed to him

that in the future—and the very near future at that—unless something lucky intervened, Gret would be a very uncomfortable quantity to deal with.

As for Gret, she walked into the house, in a rage. She was not sufficiently acquainted with the life of the average girl of her own age to know wherein lay the difference between that life and hers; neither could she quite discern where the discrepancy came in between what was right and possible under existing circumstances and what was demanded of her, but a strong sense of injustice was upon her.

She went up to her own little room, and stood at the window for a few minutes, looking out, but seeing nothing that was before her. Suddenly, with a look of defiance on her face, she walked straight out of the house and down to the river, jumped into her boat and began to row upward.

The tide was against her, but Gret was rather pleased than otherwise. The little river was influenced quite strongly by the tides, and pulling against them was no mean task; but Gret wanted something upon which to expend her rage, and sent the boat up-stream in vicious jerks. Presently she came in front of the Orchards, the pleasant and fertile domains of old Start, Robin's uncle. For twenty years the old man had stumped and graded and planted, and now his place was the one oasis of green sward and full orchards among all the surrounding sea of brush and sheer wild growth. Robin was standing on the pretty vine-clad porch of the house, and Gret coolly turned her boat toward the landing.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, rushing breathlessly down to meet her.

"Up to Spirit Lake."

Robin stared. "Where 's your father?" he inquired.

"Home."

Glancing at the half-sullen shadow on the girl's face, Robin divined that there had been friction at home. He knew Gret too well, however, to ask questions. So he stepped into the boat without any remark, and, without a word also Gret rowed off round the bend.

"Going up by the trail?" inquired Robin, as they tied up the boat.

"Nope," said Gret shortly, and Robin groaned in spirit.

The climb up the mountains to the lofty perch beneath the first White Sister was about the stiffest piece of wood-climbing to be found. There was a trail, hard for the ignorant to discern, that wound upward and somewhat softened the rigors of the climb, but in her sterner moods Gret would have none of it.

Robin followed her upward, face deep in seas of salal, and brushing savagely through dense thickets of salmon and huckleberry, creeping along fallen timber and wading cautiously through swampy groves of alder, in much secret irritation. He preferred the easier walks of life, yet it never once occurred to him to wish he had not come. As long as he and she had known each other—which comprised all the conscious years of Gret's life—he had followed her in all her undertakings, and he could not rest knowing she was upon any notable expedition of which he was not a part.

The greatest trials and the worst climbs, however, come to an end sometime, and in an hour or two they looked on the lake's serene face with the shadow of the White Sister thrown across it. Gret sighed contentedly, and sat down on one of the jagged rocks that lined the banks. She loved the lake, and knew its every aspect. How many times, obeying the marvelous enchantment of summer nights, had she slipped down the lean-to roof and come up that long trail through the whispering brush

and forest, to see the night dreaming on the Spirit's face, and watch the dawn awaken in its opaline heart.

There was only one drawback to Spirit Lake in Gret's eyes. Others knew of it beside herself. Gret was a miser in lakes. As children she and Robin had exulted in discovering new lakes among the hills. Of course, a binding feature of the contract was that each should disclose to the other the result of the various explorings, and as far as Robin was concerned the tacit agreement was doubtless kept, for the sole aim of his search was to exhibit the result of his labors to Gret. But Gret herself was less scrupulous. There were one or two exquisite little lakes that she never could bring herself to reveal; she hoarded them as a woman might hoard coveted pearls. She loved to steal away and sit on their brims and gloat over the fact that probably none but she had ever looked on their gemlike faces. But Spirit Lake was known to many, though few cared to climb to it; and so Gret felt no particular proprietorship in it.

She sat on the rock, and looked into the bright blue-green water meditatively. Robin sat near, kicking his shoes out in his impatience, but wisely saying nothing; and presently, placated by his long and deferential silence, Gret opened the conversation in her usual direct way:

"I 'm going to alter things some way, Rob."

"Yes?" said Robin dutifully.

"Yes." Her lip curled in a scornful smile. "What do you think? Father says I ought to stay at home all the time, and not go out and about as I do. Says I ought to find duties. *Find them!* Just to be doing something, and not because what I did would be any good. Nice way of spending one's life that would be, would n't it?"

"Of course—fool idea," sympathized Robin.

"Yes. Well, I 'm not going to do it!" Gret turned her

head toward her companion. "What would you do if you were me?" she inquired confidentially.

Robin ran his hand riotously through the hair that barely escaped being gingery, while the dark-brown eyes that were in curious contrast wandered restlessly over the landscape. It was a great honor, of course, to be invited to give advice to Gret, but it was also a burden and an anxiety. For in case the advice when tendered should not find favor in her eyes, the sequel was scorn and discomfort. However, Robin had but one thing to say in this instance, and it was useless wasting time considering how it would be taken.

"I don't see what else you could do but get married—like Mary and Jack did."

A quick mind-picture of Mary and the old man Gradel, Jack and the cottage, passed before Gret's eyes, and insensibly her lip curled. Still, she took no verbal exception to Robin's advice. Substantially it was the same as everybody else's, and she supposed there must be something in it. Evidently marriage was the only avenue open to the maiden who aspired to any degree of comfort, freedom and independence. There were difficulties, though.

"Who could I marry?" she asked, half amused and pleasantly regardless of grammar.

Robin did not answer this question, but he looked sulky. In all his matrimonial dreams, which the Gradel affair had made many and frequent, he never failed to install Gret as heroine. Not that there was much affection lost on either side beyond just what came of long association; but she was the only girl he knew of anything like his own age and standing, and then he had followed her around so much that he could not imagine any other state of affairs. Moreover, the ordeal of presenting any other girl as his wife for her inspection was too great to be thought of.

No, it was certainly Gret or nothing, and he was surprised that a like view had not occurred to her.

He looked at her covertly and reflectively as she sat studying the Spirit's placid waters. She was in such mood as climaxes are made of, and he felt it; and with all a youth's love of crises and—what is generally synonymous—change, he longed to employ that mood to the best advantage. But what he lacked in intuition he made up in knowledge, not of Gret's ways but the uncertainty of them. So he, too, sat gazing thoughtfully before him, afraid to break in on her mood with the cold reason of words.

He wondered when Gret would deign to give some clue as to the result, or at all events the trend, of her deliberations, and to that end sat waiting with what patience he could. When, however, she did at last speak he was knocked summarily off the heights of conjecture.

"I 'm hungry. Which do you suppose is the nearest camp, Rob?"

"None," responded Robin a trifle sulkily. "Casey's supply base is the nearest."

"Oh, no!" confidently; "that 's a good five miles up. Murray's camp is nearer than that—down, too."

"Be lots too late for lunch," predicted Robin grimly.

"That does n't matter," answered Gret cheerfully. "Mrs. Miner cooks there, and she 'll let us go into the cook-house and find what we can. Sure to be pies left over. Come on!" And jumping up, she threw her arms above her head in an animal-like stretching movement, calling into life and attention again the splendid lithe body.

Robin, too, rose, still somewhat sulky. He felt that the golden hour of opportunity was passing, and he knew not how to lay hold of it. Who could have guessed that Gret would go off at a tangent like that?

Down at Murray's camp, with a plentiful supply of cold beef, pie and coffee before her, and Mrs. Miner chattering busily near, Gret was apparently herself again. But when, after spending an hour or two at the camp, they started down toward home, Robin was pleased to see the brooding cloud which was the outward and visible sign of an inward discontent settle back on his companion's brow. Several times, as they waded and plunged down to the river, Robin's lips parted to disclose a project that had lingered in his mind for weeks now, and as many times they closed again irresolutely. He feared to cast his heart's ambition into the uncertain balance of her mood.

"Where are you going—home?" he inquired, as they climbed and slid down the treacherous yielding bank into the boat.

"No; to the camp for dinner," responded Gret laconically.

"Whistle's gone," observed Robin, searching his companion's face with narrow, reflective eyes.

"They won't be half through dinner," said Gret, pulling down stream with strokes whose power lost impressiveness because of the ease with which they were taken. They reached the landing with a rush, tied up the boat, and raced up the board-way across the marsh like two Indians.

The men were all seated at dinner in the long barn-like shed. As Gret and Robin appeared on the scene there was a slight lull in what seemed to be an animated conversation, and Oly jumped up to give Gret her accustomed seat on Dick's right, taking his own usual place opposite her. Joe, the Dago flunkey, who had taken the place of the departed Skookum of cherished memory, appeared in the doorway with a grin. Gret patted the space of board in front of her as intimation of her desires, and Joe disappeared, still grinning.

Dick, after a critical side-glance at the girl's face, went on with the interrupted conversation. "Oh, I guess they 'll come out all right."

"How can they?" demanded Cassidy, foreman barker. "They don't begin to know the first thing about running a shingle-mill. I heard 'em talking to the boss myself."

"Maybe they 'll get a good foreman," said Dick undisturbed. "He won't see 'em done up altogether."

"What 's that?" inquired Gret, interested at once.

"Two men were here talking to the boss about putting up a shingle-mill," explained Cassidy benevolently.

"Yes, and one of them was a Britisher," chimed in Oly. "You should just have heard him, Gret. 'Haw-Haw'!" And Oly mimicked an English accent to a nicety.

Gret looked thoughtfully at him for a moment, and then broke into a laugh. "Where 's he going to build it?" she asked. "Right here near the camp?"

"On the marsh—a little below the landing," said Cassidy.

"And honestly, Gret," went on Oly, his whole face beaming with appreciation of the fun of the thing. "The Britisher don't know a shingle-mill from a pump. He keeps saying, 'Well, I carnt see—Haw!' "

Gret laughed, her wicked, bubbling laugh. "What does n't he understand?"

"He don't understand nothing," declared Oly with ungrammatical impressiveness. "I 'll bet you he could n't tell what a shingle was for to save his neck."

"I guess the Britisher puts up most of the money, and the other fellow puts up the savvey," surmised Cassidy.

"Humph. He gets off cheap, then," said Oly scornfully.

"Oh, well, let them put up the mill if they want to," said Dick indulgently. "Even if they can't run it, it 'll be there for somebody else to."

"Sure," allowed Oly magnanimously.

This brought the discussion to a temporary close, and Dick turned his attention to Gret. "Father's been looking for you," he informed her.

"That so? Did n't look far enough, did he?" responded Gret dryly.

"Suppose not. Where were you?"

"Up at Spirit Lake," with a faint smile of satisfaction.

Dick lifted his eyebrows. "Up there? What made you take a notion to go up there?"

"Mad," explained Gret briefly.

"Oh! Well, if I was you I'd go home and go right to bed, and not fuss with him," advised Dick gravely.

"Yes—perhaps I will," assented Gret grudgingly.

"Because he was looking all over for you," went on Dick; "and if he says nothing this time, don't take any more chances, Gret. Stay home while your father's down."

"I won't!" responded Gret in a soft voice, but with flaring eyes. "There's no sense in it—no sense at all—telling a person to sit about the house all day!" And she attacked the piece of pie in front of her with such smothered rage that the well-meaning Dick was at a loss what to say or leave unsaid.

"Well, he's only home now and again," he observed soothingly.

"Yes. But if they put up the shingle-mill, he's going to be home quite often," put in the accommodating Oly.

"Don't see what difference that'll make to him," said Dick gruffly.

"More company, perhaps. Anyway, that's what he told those men," insisted Oly.

Gret finished her pie in silence, rose, and without a word to any one walked out of the room and away toward the skid-road.

"Never said 'Good night,' 'Kiss my foot,' or anything," said Oly in a complaining murmur.

Robin followed Gret out quickly and quietly, coming up with her as she reached the skid-road. But he said nothing until she stepped out of the boat upon her own landing, and then, as she turned to mount the bluff-steps, he asked quietly :

"Come down to the Harbor to-morrow, Gret?" He waited a second. "Perhaps the old man would catch you, though."

This last was a deft poke at the still hot embers of Gret's resentment. Her lips went together instantly as she answered, "Don't care if he does. What time?"

Robin considered a moment. And Gret, considering the tides also, failed for once to notice that he avoided her gaze, and that there was a sort of flushed, conscious look on his face.

"Tide 's well turned out by seven, has n't it?" he inquired.

Gret nodded.

"Seven, then—eh?"

"All right." And Gret turned once more, and went up the steep path, a look of added determination on her face.

CHAPTER V

A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

VERY early in the sweet, chill May morning Gret rose and made a full-dress toilette. The hair that was usually tied away in any style, she wound in smooth coils at the back of her head, pinning on the straw sailor which, to her everlasting disgust, was all she had in the way of a dress hat. Her longest skirt and her best waist, which was a pink cotton, completed her holiday attire.

Yet the extreme simplicity, almost poverty, of the girl's attire, could not hide the fine, full-chested figure, to which every velvety, obedient muscle lent its own divinely appointed line of grace. And Robin, glancing up at her from the boat wherein he sat waiting, noted this effect with especial approval. He noted, too, with additional satisfaction, that Gret looked quite a woman. And so she did. For the next five or ten years she would alter very little.

She stepped into the boat, and they rowed quietly off. "They 're all asleep in the house yet," she observed with satisfaction. And Robin smiled absently in reply.

Both young people seemed to be somewhat preoccupied as they rowed down toward the Harbor. Otherwise Gret would certainly have noticed that the usually lazy, jocular Robin was rowing in a steady purposeful way marvelous for him; and would, moreover, have been struck with the fact that he did not once during the whole length of the journey demand that she take a turn at the oars.

In a surprisingly short time they seemed to reach the little landing just outside the town, where it was customary for loggers and ranchers coming down the river to tie up their boats. Gret got out, and began to walk in a leisurely way toward the one real street of the place, leaving Robin to tie up and follow.

He came hurrying after her.

"Come with me, Gret," said Robin disjointedly, "I want to do—to—to show you something."

Gret was astounded and hurried after him in great curiosity. It was so surprising, to begin with, for Robin to have a project all his own.

They hurried up the street, and then Robin led the way down the plank-walk and on to the little wharf against which the tiny Montyville steamer lay. She was whistling her coming departure, and the mate stood at the gang-plank to hasten on intending passengers.

Gret turned and looked questioningly at her companion, and he motioned her to go on board.

"On board?" she gasped incredulously.

"Yes." Nervously. "Go on, Gret. I 'll tell you all about it on board. See—others are coming behind us, and you are stopping up the gang-way."

Thus adjured, Gret walked on board, coolly enough, crossed the little deck in a leisurely way, backed herself against the poop taffrail, and turned on Robin, who was following just behind.

"What are you going to Montyville for?" she demanded.

"Don't you like the trip?" inquired Robin evasively.

"Oh, yes, of course I do," impatiently; "but you 're not taking me for that. What are you going for?"

"Gret, don't be angry, now," began Robin, scrubbing the deck assiduously with the sole of his shoe. "I knew if I told you about it before, you 'd get thinking it over

all ways, and perhaps would n't do it. But you know you were saying that you were going to get away from home and be your own boss, and there 's only one way you can do that." He stopped, scanning her stolid face anxiously. In spite of its stolidity, though, enlightenment was dawning in her eyes. "And so," he went on, coloring furiously, "I thought—" He stopped again.

"You thought we 'd go to Montyville and be married," finished the girl coolly.

"Yes. I thought we 'd get the license anyway. Will you, Gret? Just think what a lovely drop you 'd have on your father."

Gret made no reply, but stood staring in half-amused amazement at her companion. To think that he had actually been able to evolve such a plan in his own mind. It was altogether unprecedented, and Gret was divided between amazement and a sort of indignation at such unwonted temerity. She felt like a woman who has been leading a baby round by the hand under the impression that it could not stand, only to see it walk off when occasion presented. She did not for the moment consider the proposition made to her; but presently she turned her face toward the river, and, while the boat steamed down the Wishkah, reached the confluence, and turned up the more important Necanum, she divided her attention between the scenery and the matter in hand.

Gret was never afraid, and never hesitated, immediately to undertake anything that appealed either to her inclination or her sense of present advisability. And that for the simple reason that she always contrived afterward to arrange the consequences pretty much to suit herself. Three fourths of the people in this strange, deluded world are handled by circumstances; the remaining fourth handle them. Either course is open to all—a fact which is realized by amazingly few. Gret was one of those

born with a strong conviction that circumstances, and combinations of circumstances, were made for individual arrangement according to the needs and desires of the moment; therefore she stood at all times unabashed in the face of things. Therefore, too, she considered now merely the present fitness of the scheme in question. If it answered for the present, she would see to it that it answered for the future. Robin's home, and of course his future property, was sufficiently ahead of Mary Gradel's venture to be practicable. After deliberation on most points it seemed that it was, on the whole, about as good a solution of present difficulties as could be evolved out of materials to hand.

Gret was too entirely ignorant of marriage and its true significance to consider it from any but the most superficial standpoint. Really, it can hardly be said that she considered it from any but a purely financial one. Of the strong woman instincts, the keen sense of the dignified and the fit, that was within her she never dreamed. Had any one come up to her just then and, taking her aside, explained the inner mysteries of wifehood, she would have turned from the whole project with loathing. As it was, she concluded to accept the proposition for its present worth.

It was characteristic of her that when they walked off the boat at Montyville, she made no remark as to the result of her deliberations, but merely turned to her companion with a matter-of-fact question: "What are you going to do first?"

"Why, I thought," began Robin, brightening up immediately, "that if you 'd wait here a little while, I 'd go and get that fellow that helped me and Jack get his license, and go and get it myself—the license, I mean. And say, Gret, I was thinking—don't you think, after I 've got it, it would be a good idea to be married right

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away here, where nobody knows us? We don't want a lot of guys watching us up the street and laughing, as they did to Jack."

"I should say not!" frowning at the mere idea. "Yes—go and get it, and don't be long. I'll wait here," turning to the busy little water-front with an air of content.

Robin hastened off immediately, and Gret promptly forgot everything in her interest in the novel sights along the wharf—the busy little passenger steamers, the ferries, and the many lumber-carrying vessels ranged alongside. It was considerably over an hour before Robin got back, but Gret had not noticed the lapse of time in the least. Robin was alone and triumphant.

"I did n't tell that fellow that you were with me, else he'd have come along just to see what sort of girl you were," he observed with an air of contented wisdom. "I told him I was going straight on to Cathsamet. We'd have had a job shaking him if I had n't. And I've got it," he concluded triumphantly, waving before Gret's eyes the law's permission to wed. "I said I was twenty-three and you twenty-two."

Gret scanned the license curiously, and then looked up for a further recital of plans.

"I noticed a What-do-you-call-it's office on a street as I came along," went on Robin, who had been waiting impatiently for the perusal of the license to end. "Justice, I mean. It's a real estate office, too. But that does n't matter. There's no one in it, eh?"

"Yes, that'll do," agreed Gret, turning away reluctantly from the enticing water-front. "Come along. Let's go and get it over."

Robin led the way up the street with appropriately beaming eyes. He alone realized the position, and intended to extract all the sweetness and thrilling sentiment accorded by the ages to marriage.

"Don't you feel funny, Gret?" he asked as they went up the street.

"Funny?" inquired that eminently practical being. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean kind of shy?"

Gret turned the coolest of green-brown eyes on her companion. "Shy? What should I feel shy about? We 're not the only people in the world that ever got married."

"No, of course not," subdued, and struck by the truth of the observation.

"That 's just what the justice is there for—one of the things," went on Gret. "I don't see why I should be shy about telling him to marry me than I should be about telling Mr. Dimsdale to give me a pound of tea. That 's what he 's there for."

Robin's sentiment shrank abashed in the face of such withering practicality, and he said no more until they reached Judge Coe's office.

In his spare moments—which were many—the judge dabbled in real estate. The rush of business in this line did not tend as a rule seriously to interfere with his legal and official duties; but as it happened this day the judge was to meet after luncheon an eastern man who possessed every attribute of an ideal buyer; that is, he had money he wanted to spend, he was of a trusting nature, and he was totally ignorant of the value of western lands in general and of the judge's own lands—which were swamp half the year—in particular. So he eyed the young couple, who presented themselves before him just as he was about to leave, with no particular favor, and proceeded to hurry the business over. He glanced hastily over the license, called to the woman who lived in the rear of the building to come and bring her son with her as witnesses, and then ranged the two in front of him. In

all probability, at some time or other, the judge had heard of Silway's camp; nevertheless, just now the two names "Helen Margaret Silway" and "Robert Wynne Start" had no special significance in his eyes. Neither was the fact that the owners of them were unaccompanied by friends. So many young people, emigrants many of them, working in camps and ranches away in the woods and hills, came in alone to be married, having in many instances no relatives in this part of the country to be interested one way or another.

Perhaps Judge Coe did not make the ceremony quite as short as Gret's acquaintance of previous mention, but he came very near it. And Gret, remembering Robin's theories as to the proper and fitting length of such ceremonies, laughed in her sleeve.

"He 's almost as quick as Ericson, is n't he?" she remarked, as they fared forth down the street again.

"Yes," agreed Robin dreamily. He was trying to realize it all, and failing. Presently, however, he roused himself and treated Gret to some sweet cider and cake, which met with her approval more than anything that had yet transpired. Then they took in the stores, and Gret mentally selected an elaborate trousseau to be obtained some time in the dim future. Robin sauntered along by her side; but he continued to be dreamy and was inclined to be laconic, and it was fortunate for him that Gret was too much taken up with sight-seeing to notice anything out of the way in his demeanor.

Then they went on board the little steamer again, and were puffed off, back down the Necanum, to home and happiness—or whatever else might be in store for them. And here it was that Robin made his first mistake. He delivered himself of the consolidated result of his late dreams and rhapsodies.

By nature variable and impulsive, given to chasing

with great ardor anything that eluded and as quickly dropping it when obtained, Robin was full of a shallow sentiment more rapid in its ebb and flow than the waters of the Wishkah. If he had been brought up in a community where girls were plentiful, he would have done what all other specimens of his kind do—have fallen in love forty times a month, only to fall out again as quickly. Just now he was working up a sentiment over Gret.

“Gret,” he whispered, as they leaned together watching the busy stern wheel foaming on its way through the waters. “Have you thought—I ’m your husband now.”

Gret straightened herself like a shot from her leaning position on the rail, and stared at Robin as if he had suddenly presented for her inspection some rare zoölogical specimen. She looked him up and down from head to foot, and then up and down again. And if ever there was a time in Robin’s life when it was the height of folly to court a close personal inspection, then was the time. His face was flushed and beaming with the excitement of the day, but toning down the glow of youthful enthusiasm was a plentiful sprinkling of dust and smut from the steamer; his hair, from frequent removals and readjustings of his cap, stood on end at various angles; and his trousers, which looked all right up in the camp, on the level deck of the steamer seemed laughably short. Caping all was an expression of countenance which in Gret’s eyes was absolutely invaluable and unique—a mixture of sheepishness, sentiment and embarrassment. She looked him over and over, gathering in with keen, appreciative eyes each ridiculous detail, and then she laughed outright—a bubbling, gurgling laugh of pure mirth that would not be repressed. Robin colored angrily, and stood for a moment before her, astounded and altogether taken aback. But the more Gret tried to restrain her mirth, the more it overcame her: in fact, she simply could not bear

to look at her companion just then, so comically did he strike her in the light of his new and recently asserted relationship. Finally, seeing no signs of approaching penitence or cessation of mirth, and furiously enraged, Robin stalked off to the other end of the boat, leaving Gret to laugh out her fit at leisure. This she did, desisting finally from pure exhaustion and leaning her back against the rail again with a little sigh, her eyes still quivering dangerously and her eyes still sparkling. Doubtless she would have been immediately overcome again had Robin approached her just then; but, fortunately, he kept sulkily and studiously aloof until they reached Quellish Harbor. Then they drifted silently together, and hurried through the little town to the boat floating idly at the logger's steps; silently, too, they got in. And then Robin began to row gravely up-stream, never so much as glancing at the girl sitting demurely before him.

The quick spring twilight was falling on the land, and a sighing little night wind came off the banks and ruffled the darkening surface of the water. And as he rowed the exaltation of the day died down in Robin's breast, and he was assailed by a great flatness. The tide of ambition and brave intent, that had surged so proudly in the brightness of the day, now ebbed as rapidly, and on its gray shores Robin stood suddenly sobered. He had desired without troubling to reason, had schemed without ever pausing to note the result. His schemes, as far as they went, had reached fruition, and his desire was in his hands. But, oh, how flat are the table-lands of Attainment.

When the home of one's childhood begins to take its place among the uncertainties of life, it is time to reflect seriously. And really, when Robin came to think over all points of the case, it was plain that much was yet in the lap of the Fates. His uncle was not so grumpy and morose a man as old Gradel, but he was infinitely more

peculiar. He might, without any particular fuss or bother, just calmly set his face against the whole thing, and that would be an end of the matter as far as Robin and his home was concerned. If he said: "Take your wife, and go get a home of your own," there would be nothing left to do but go. And positively, when Robin came to look at the Great Happening with his uncle's eyes it had very little to recommend it. The everlasting example, the great parallel Gradel case, was in reality no parallel and no example at all. Gret was no addition to a household. She could not cook an atom, and it was doubtful if she would even if she could; and even if she could and would, it signified nothing. A capable widow, Mrs. Bennett, had cooked at the Orchards for years, and was not likely now to be replaced by Gret, especially as old Start was more or less of an invalid, having had attacks of heart trouble, and the widow, who had studied him and his health, cooked exactly to suit him. No, there was very little to recommend the matter to his uncle, and Robin marveled that he had not thought of all these things before. It would certainly mean getting a home for himself, and working hard to keep it up. And though, of course, it was awfully nice to have a home of one's own and be a proper married man, yet the somewhat idle, easy life he had led became suddenly pleasant to reflect upon. However, it was all right—only, night was a particularly gloomy time to invite a fuss and get ordered out of one's home. They were rounding the last bend of the river when he turned suddenly to Gret. "Say, Gret."

"Hum?"

"Suppose we don't say anything about it all until tomorrow, eh?"

Even in the failing light he felt the instant lowering of her eyes to his face. "Of course not. You won't say anything about it at all until I tell you."

Robin was silent, realizing the uselessness of the question. It was borne in unto him that, after all, affairs were in Gret's hands more than his, and that taking thought for the morrow in his case was waste of energy. There was a decided sense of relief, however, in turning the whole affair over to Gret, and Robin gave a slight sigh as the burden of directorship fell from his shoulders.

"Be in the camp any time to-morrow, do you suppose?" he inquired as Gret jumped to the landing.

"Oh, sure to—some time or other," thoughtfully; "but I don't exactly know when. Still, I'll find you if I want you," with a calm nod.

Robin returned the nod, and then, as Gret went into the house, began to row swiftly up-stream, a slightly apprehensive look on his face as he thought of his uncle's probable displeasure at his prolonged and inexplicable absence.

And Gret, making a detour of the house, slipped into the kitchen, where she learned with satisfaction that her father had not yet returned from the Harbor, and that Lizzie had thoughtfully secreted for her an appropriate portion of the evening meal. She sat down with peace in her heart and ate heartily.

By and by, after visiting her jackdaw, asleep on his perch—an honor for which he was not grateful—she went to bed. She lay thinking over the affair of the day for a while; and then, suddenly wearying, she banished it all from her mind and went to sleep.

Her father was at the breakfast-table the following morning when Gret came demurely in and took her seat. He glanced at her with disfavor, apparently having it in mind to say something anent her repeated absences; apparently, too, he changed his mind, for he said nothing. He was about to return to town, where his home affairs would cease to annoy, and then he was busy with various

projects. So he finished his breakfast in austere silence, and then rose, leaving Gret to the remainder of the meal and her own devices. These consisted of concluding the breakfast as quickly as possible and getting down to the river.

Gret had a little expedition in mind, and she lost no time in getting away in her boat.

At a certain spot she tied up her boat, and sauntered up the trail to the Gradel cottage. It was built on the side of a steep ravine, and as she rounded the entrance to it the Gradel dog came barking out to meet her. Close on his heels came Mary, curious to see who had broken the habitual solitude. Her eyes brightened on beholding Gret. Her dishes were washed and the stove cleaned off, and she had time for a long chat—most rare and delightful of luxuries.

"Come on in, Gret," she shouted, with perhaps just a speck of proprietorial pride in her voice. This speck, however, was immediately detected, and Gret sat promptly down on a clump of moss and brake.

"No, I like it outside better. Come and sit here, Mary."

Thus adjured, Mary sat down, and began at once that confidential chat to another of her kind for which her shallow, girlish soul so often hungered. Gret did little but listen, slowly guiding the conversation whither she wanted it. And at last, so guided, it fell on Mary's marriage. Then Gret's head rested on her hands, and leaning forward she asked with whispering reverence such questions concerning matrimony as were calculated to open the flood-gates of Mary's eloquence. And thus it was. Mary took her by the hand, and with many sayings of wisdom led her into the Holy of Holies.

When the tree of knowledge, as represented by Mary, was stripped bare of its most hidden fruits, Gret took her departure and rowed down to the camp. She went

straight up the skid-road on her way to the felling grounds to catch possibly a chain of logs coming down. She paused just a moment to look down into the camp from her elevation on the road. Jake was frying onions for the noon meal, and the odor of his endeavors was wafted on the breeze. Gret called to him.

"Jake! Say—Jake!"

Jake came to the door of the cook-house, and looked inquiringly toward the skid-road.

"Say, Jake, you 're all right, but you don't know it all!"

And leaving him in open-mouthed receipt of this announcement of his limitations, Gret went lightly on her way.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT AFFRONT

THE shingle-mill got built and started running—two facts that considerably amazed the interested spectators in Silway's camp. Such an exhibition of utter ignorance and inexperience of the lumber business as that presented by Transome and Fonseker, the two young mill-owners, had not come the way of Silway's men before, and they extracted all possible fun and excitement contemplating the course of it. Gradually, however, out of all the delays, errors and follies surrounding it the mill contrived to evolve itself, the evolution being chiefly due to the interest taken in the matter by Mr. Silway. As it was principally due to his remarks and suggestions that the young men in the first place decided upon a shingle-mill as a way of investing their capital and energy, he felt it was in a manner incumbent upon him to see them fairly started on the venture. So he overlooked to a considerable extent the building of the structure, and helped in the choice and installation of the machinery; but that done, and the mill ready for running, he felt acquitted of any further obligation in the matter, and went back to his beloved city with a soothing sense of duty fully done.

Then Silway's camp beheld the rallying about the new mill of all the scapegrace shingle-weavers and sawyers who could not obtain a steady job in any of the Harbor mills. These were promptly hired upon their own statement of merits, and started in to contribute their share to that failure which was surely imminent.

Gret was in camp for supper, one night, and sat, as she always did, on Dick's right and opposite Oly. By accident, tacit agreement, or something never expressed, the main intellects of the camp were always gathered together at this end of the table. Here, in the rough and unpolished, were socialists, pessimists, optimists and philanthropists; here, too, from time immemorial had Gret delivered her opinions to a waiting world. The new hands at the camp always took up their places nearer the foot of the long table; those round Dick on either side had mostly been with the camp for more or less lengthy periods. And these old hands formed quite a group; for it was the boast of the men at Silway's that the camp contained more old hands than any other camp to be mentioned, partly on account of the general liking for the foreman, and partly because of the comfort which, as far as was practicable in a logging-camp, he took care to provide.

Gret sat now, listening with a keen narrowing of the eyes as each man added his item of views about the new mill. Finally she spoke.

"Well, now, I 'll tell you what," said the girl, her ringing, incisive tones commanding instant attention. "You 're all pretty mean; that 's all. You just see those men making fool mistakes and wasting their money without saying a word. Why don't you go and tell them, instead of coming here and laughing at them?"

Oly rose up in his seat and bent half-way across the table in his excitement. "You can't do it! You can't do it!" he shouted. "You can't teach 'em nothing. They know it all. Why, when they hired that Danny Pfeiffer I told them he was n't no more of a shingle-weaver than I was. But Transome said he knew a shingle-weaver when he saw one, and as long as Pfeiffer suited him it was all right. It 's good enough for 'em," concluded Oly,

subsiding into his seat once more. "All they get is good enough for 'em!"

"You had a right to go to the Englishman about it," observed Jim Caffrey, foreman "feller." "He 's the one that 's putting up the stuff, and he 's the one that 's losing it, I reckon."

But Oly shook his head. "He just goes to Transome with everything, and Transome knows it all. So, what are you going to do?"

This view was general, and the subject was dropped for the time being. But Gret took the whole matter under advisement. She intended to look into it. The underneath cause was always hers, possibly because it generally needed fighting for.

Though Gret had a good general idea of the workings of a shingle-mill, yet she had no actual and specific knowledge concerning it. And this defect she proceeded at once to rectify. She went down to the Harbor and visited the foremost mill there. She was known to all or most of the men, and her questions, which were most minute and far-reaching, were readily answered. She wandered round, too, and very little escaped her roving eyes. Then she went back home, and subjected the Transome-Fonseker mill to a like scrutiny. Then she sought Fonseker, as being the greatest loser and therefore the most injured of the parties concerned, and imparted to him the sum total of her investigations. The pith and core of her remarks was, that his logs were being sawn up in rank and murderous waste, and that in order to make the mill pay it must turn out as many shingles in one day as now it did in a week. Fonseker was considerably staggered, and, as Oly had said, immediately sought Transome. And Transome was just as immediately indignant. Gret's communications cast reflections upon his ability to run a mill, and with his ex-

perience went the main part of his capital in the concern. As Oly had once shrewdly opined, experience was about all he had, and in this his poverty was apparent to all observers. So, now, Transome approached Gret upon the first opportunity.

"You 're a smart little girl," he began, and then paused, the patronizing smile dying off his face. He was rather surprised at the flash of instant anger that shot into the strange-colored eyes of the girl before him. He resumed: "You know, you can stuff Fonseker with anything. That 's dead easy. But you can't stuff me. I know your father wants our mill. But he won't get it. I 'm not to be scared out of it, even if Fonseker is."

Gret made no reply; she merely stood looking at the speaker. Secretly she was at first considerably taken aback, such a base view of her motives never having even presented itself to her. And when at a loss she invariably sought refuge in silence. Then, when she had regained mental equilibrium, the whole thing did not seem worth replying to. So she stood silent, her eyes narrowing as she surveyed the man before her in contemplative perspective. To her, many as were the types of men she had met, he was a new specimen on the face of the earth. Then she turned coolly round, listening on the wind whether the hum of the donkey was still to be heard. It was; and she went down to the boat and rowed up to the camp.

Very few things required a greater effort on Gret's part than to be confidential. She was naturally secretive. Very little that went in at the gates of her understanding ever came forth again over the threshold of her lips. But this time she went straight to Dick Swinton and related all that had just transpired. Dick's rage exceeded Gret's by many degrees.

"The dirty, low-living cur!" he said in heartfelt tones. "If he was n't already going downhill just as fast and as slick as he can, we 'd show him a thing or two. Where 'd he get his lumber from if not from here? And how much do you suppose the boss would let him have if he heard how he 's talking?"

Gret laughed, amused at the rage of the usually quiet man, and perhaps a little bit touched at his partizan devotion. "Oh, I don't know. I expect father would only say it served me right; that I should have minded my own business. Never mind. Transome's finish is in sight all right enough."

And with that the incident closed, only that the mill saw her no more, neither could either of its proprietors approach within a hundred yards of her. That was all as far as she was concerned; but several effects grew out of this cause, of which Gret was not cognizant; or, if so, only by degrees did it dawn upon her. To begin with, in some unspoken, vague way it got about that Gret had been snubbed down at the mill, and neither Transome nor Fonseker nor any of their employees could get a civil word or look from the camp fraternity. Moreover, and, more important, the character of the logs supplied began slowly to alter. Up to this neither Dick nor any of his boom-hands had ever attempted to take the least advantage of the palpable ignorance and incompetence displayed at the mill, but had honestly supplied just such quality and quantity of lumber as the price to be paid called for. Now Dick himself was the first, one day, to pass a poor log into a raft about to be towed down to the mill.

"What 's it matter?" he said contemptuously. "All these fine logs are just sawn up so as to be half wasted anyhow. It 's good enough for 'em."

And that was the beginning. Thereafter if any really

fine logs got wasted down at the mill, they did not come out of Silway's boom.

Matters were so far gone beforehand, however, that it is doubtful whether this really hastened the end very materially. Transome, the man who had sworn defiance to failure, was the very man to precipitate matters. He saw, as he could not very well help seeing, that the end was not very far distant; and he conceived the brilliant idea of withdrawing at once while there might still be something to take. So one afternoon he coolly announced that he was altogether tired of the lumber business and intended to sell out. Fonseker could either buy him out, or he must find someone else to take over his half of the concern.

"But, my dear fellow," remonstrated Fonseker. "*Your half*—what did you put in?"

And then Transome hastened to show that what he put in signified little when it came to a question of what he should take out. They were partners, which meant that half of everything was his. Otherwise, what did Mr. Fonseker suppose he had been wasting time fooling about the mill all these months for?

Fonseker at first argued, then became enraged, and finally went down to the Harbor to consult the one enterprising attorney residing there. To his dismay, he learned that Transome was secure in his demands. The mill had been built under contract to both jointly; all sales had been made in the name of both, and all bills been paid likewise; and, in the absence of any written agreement to the contrary, in the eyes of the law and the world they were equal partners. If Fonseker had produced all the cash, while only securing to himself half the honor, he had only himself to blame.

"And now," advised the attorney, who, if he was not infallible at law, was deeply versed in the ways of men,

"you just go home and let things go on as they are for a while longer. Unless I 'm mistaken, he 'll soon offer to compromise."

"Well, but everything will go to smash before long," demurred Fonseker gloomily.

"Not right away, will it?" inquired the attorney sharply.

"No-o—not immediately, I suppose."

"Well, then, he won't let it go that far before he climbs down. He 'll be afraid of getting nothing. If he offers to take a small sum to clear out, you come to me, and I 'll fix papers quitting him of all claims safely enough."

"Perhaps he 'll get someone to buy his half, as he calls it," observed Fonseker resentfully.

"Oh, he may," agreed the attorney easily. "And if he does, all right. You 'll be just as well off as you are now, besides being rid of him and perhaps having more capital to put in the mill."

Fonseker nodded. "If he sells out to me at some price or other, what shall I do then?" he inquired innocently.

The attorney smiled. "Why, whatever you think best—sell the mill and pocket what 's left after everything 's paid, if you want to. For my part, though, I 'd get another partner and go on running it. It ought to pay."

"It does n't," said Fonseker sadly.

"I expect you don't know how to run it. Ever run a shingle-mill before?"

"No. Never saw one."

"Transome—did he?"

"Says so," scornfully; "but I begin to doubt it."

"H'm! You see, neither of you knows anything about the business. That mill ought to pay first-rate. Everybody says so." The attorney leaned back in his chair and scrutinized the young Englishman's frank but gloomy countenance. "Silway's folks up at the camp near you—

they understand the whole business from A to Z. Why did n't you get them to show you a thing or two?"

But Bertie Fonseker made no actual reply to this query, only giving a mournful little shake of the head. He was stricken with a decided feeling of remorse. He recalled that interview with Gret and what, in the light of after events, were clearly words of truth and sincerity of purpose. He wondered what Transome had said to her regarding that incident. Nothing pleasant, he could tell; for now there was no getting near her. Well, one thing only was clear in the midst of all the muddle and tangle: he had been a most amazing fool.

So, with a sort of subdued dignity, Fonseker went back to the mill and admitted to Transome that his partnership claim would have to be allowed. At the same time he refused to buy him out. They would, he remarked, both go smash together.

Transome waited a week or two to see if Fonseker were merely running a game of bluff; and then, as the attorney had predicted, he offered to compromise, naming a very reasonable sum as relinquishment of all rights in the mill. In the meantime Fonseker had been turning over in his mind the lawyer's advice to keep the mill running. But he must have another partner, with some money at all events; and at this juncture he bethought himself of his one-time chum, Bobbie Baring. Bobbie was the son of a widow of high social standing. Thus far his energies had been confined to making his ideas, which were expensive, conform to his mother's income, which was limited.

It was characteristic now of Fonseker's utter lack of business qualifications that, having failed in this his last undertaking as the result of total ignorance of the matter in hand, he should entertain the idea of another partner of equal, or if possible even greater, ignorance. But

nothing of this sort troubling Bertie, he wrote to Bobbie that his partner in a shingle-mill venture wanted to sell out his share for a very reasonable sum considering the worth of the enterprise. The mill could be made to do a sweeping business; but a little more capital was needed, and could n't Bobbie somehow raise this and come up and buy the other fellow out? It was great fun, with splendid duck shooting in season, to say nothing of the probable harvest of dollars.

After much deliberation, many tears, and finally much scheming, Mrs. Baring raised the sum of money necessary, and sent Bobbie, convalescing from a recently broken heart, on his way to join Fonseker. He would be out of mischief for a while, she thought, and a time in the backwoods, away from people, might quiet him down. And he might, too, make money. People did all sorts of queer things in that vast, trackless, and altogether unimagined region vaguely known to her as "the North," and often seemed to get quite rich on nothing at all, except, perhaps, the natural resources of the land. Mrs. Baring was about as ignorant of the conditions of life in that part of her native country to which Bobbie journeyed as any foreigner could be. She had been born and raised in cities, and the long years of her widowhood had been spent abroad. So, as far as she and Bobbie were concerned, that enterprising young man, with many promises of a speedy return of the money lent, and a heart full of the wildest ambitions, departed for the unknown.

On learning that Bobbie was to join him, Fonseker paid over to Transome the sum of money mentioned; and long and explicit was the legal document by which the now cautious Bertie caused Transome to formally renounce all connection with the mill henceforth and forever. Short and sweet was the Godspeed given.

"Good-by. Can't honestly say I'm sorry you're going.

Still, I 'm glad to have known you if only for one thing."

"What 's that?" inquired the Texan incautiously.

"You 've taught me what kind of treatment to expect in America."

"Same kind of treatment that you 'd get in any other country if you happen to be a sucker!" was the quick retort. Which ended the interview.

CHAPTER VII

GRET COMES TO THE RESCUE

BOBBIE arrived on the Wishkah, and was immediately delighted with all he saw. The frame house, whose walls were not even papered, was a huge joke to him, as were also the manners and service of the Swedish girl who was housekeeper, cook and maid-of-all-work rolled into one stolid personage.

But what struck Bobbie more than anything else was the boundless possibilities of such an amazing enterprise as a shingle-mill. He stood and looked at the endless timber about him. All you had to do was to cut it down and put it through the saws and there you had shingles, a thing that any one who built any kind of a house was simply bound to have. Why, it was better than a gold mine!

Bertie Fonseker stood by while his friend rhapsodized with a somewhat guilty feeling at heart. He did not correct or explain away erroneous impressions, however. Bobbie would learn soon enough.

Bobbie Baring was thoughtless and impetuous, quickly taken with everything new and the first to run after it; easily raised to the highest pinnacle of hope and as soon cast down; but with it all he was not actually a fool. And it was not long before he began to notice that the output seemed to be steady and unremitting, while the income was hardly to be discerned—indeed, as far as his own pockets were concerned, not discernible at all so

far. Just as soon as this idea took definite shape he repaired to Fonseker for explanations; and that gentleman, seeing that the inevitable time had come, sat down and explained—that is, explained as far as he was able. He was not at all clear himself why the mill did not pay. He knew it did n't; that was all.

Bobbie listened, amazed, but understanding. "Oh, then," he interrupted once, "we have to pay for all the logs we get to saw up? I thought we just had to pay to get them sawn down and brought to us."

"Oh, no, we pay so much a foot for the lumber."

"Well, does all this belong to some one?" inquired Bobbie, with a wide flourish of the hand to indicate the surrounding timber.

Fonseker nodded gravely. "Yes, it mostly belongs to Silway, owner of the big camp up above."

Bobbie nodded absently. He was just adding up in his mind the true significance of all Fonseker had just told him. It meant failure, of course—more or less speedy, but sure. Failure again! Poor Bobbie experienced an immediate sinking of temperament. He was cast down in spirit, but really more on his mother's account than his own. Bobbie was not a bad youth at heart, and he was ashamed. She had done her best for him, and so far he had been an unredeemed and disgusting failure. Bobbie suddenly left the house, and went and sat by the river. He wanted time to study himself anew as a failure.

It was a disagreeable task, and the taste of his reflections was bitter in the mouth. Bobbie's face was very wry as he thought of all the ignominious details of his return to that home from which he had so lately gone forth as a knight clad for the fray. So very disturbing did his thoughts become, as a lively and too obliging imagination filled elaborate details into the mental pic-

ture, that Bobbie welcomed with a sigh of resignation and relief interruption of them in the form of a lithe young girl walking up the path to the river.

As the first vision of a girl in the wilds she was a trifle disappointing. All the heroines of the far West that Bobbie had seen described in the lurid literature of his youth wore buckskin shoes and were armed to the teeth. But this girl wore a waist affair and a skirt, like any ordinary girl.

Gret, all unaware of her shortcomings, looked keenly at Bobbie as she approached. She was quick to detect the shadow on the pleasant, impudent face. And when he raised his cap and smiled, she paused. It was the first time she had recognized anything that belonged to the mill since the time of the Great Affront.

"Don't you shoot?" inquired Bobbie, forgetting that to any one not conversant with the trend of his thoughts the words might sound a trifle eccentric.

Gret's eyes opened slowly. The greeting was so singular. "Shoot what?"

Bobbie laughed, recollecting himself. "Why, I mean, I thought all Western young ladies had six-shooters with them, and shot anything and everything they did n't like."

"It would be very nice to be able to do that," dryly, "but I'm afraid it would n't last long. Get locked up."

"Oh, do they lock people up for shooting up here?" asked Bobbie, honestly astonished.

"You bet your life! Try it and see."

"Oh!" Bobbie looked surprised. "Pooh," he observed; then, "One could just walk off into this forest, and who on earth could find you?"

"Yes, you *could* do that," admitted Gret; "but the sheriff and his posse would come up and look for you; and you'd have a great time getting food."

More illusions gone. Bobbie paused a moment to re-

adjust his ideas. Meanwhile Gret returned to her first impressions—the shadow she had observed on her companion's face.

"Feeling homesick?" she queried.

"No—oh, no!" decidedly. "Just—oh, just getting used to a disappointment; that's all."

"About the mill not paying?" asked the girl, with a backward movement of the head.

"Yes," rather surprised at her ready intuition.

"Well, did you ever suppose it would?" inquired Gret with slight scorn.

"Well, of course I did," indignantly. "Do you suppose I'd take my mother's money and come up here and just throw it away—not even expect to have a run for it?"

"Why did you put money into anything before you knew all about it?" demanded Gret in a businesslike way.

"Well, Mr. Fonseker said it was a fine venture," explained Bobbie. "He still says it would pay finely if only we knew how to run it."

"Oh, he does, does he?" said Gret triumphantly. "Found out that all I said was quite true, has n't he?"

"All you said?" repeated Bobbie blankly.

"Yes; I told them long ago they were going to smash. And I told them what to do to get right, too."

"And what did they say?" inquired Bobbie, immensely astonished.

"They said—" and Gret's eyes flashed again at the mere recollection—"that I was just trying to scare them out of the mill so that my father could buy it. Pshaw! Suppose if my father had wanted a shingle-mill he could n't have got it himself years ago?"

"Of course," agreed Bobbie instantly. "It was a beastly caddish thing to say. Fonseker never said it, I know. He's too much of a gentleman."

"I spoke to Fonseker himself," said Gret; "and he went

and told Transome—the other fellow—and Transome came and said that to me.”

“Well, I don’t believe Fonseker knew anything about it,” declared Bobbie, springing to his feet in his excitement. “I ’m just going to see. If he did, he ’s a cad, and I shall tell him so. Any one has only to look at you to see you ’re all right.”

Gret smiled, a smile of real kindliness and amusement, at this compliment, which she recognized as spontaneous and not a mere administration of “hot air.” Then she passed on; and Bobbie strode back to the mill.

The next time he met Gret, which was at the entrance to the camp, he made many and painstaking excuses for Fonseker.

“I told you I was sure he had nothing to do with what that fellow said. And he had n’t. And Transome never told him what he had said to you, either. Of course, it does n’t signify one way or another now. Only I hated to leave you with such an idea of Fonseker.”

Gret nodded indifferently. The momentary gratification consequent on having her words shown up so forcibly as truth had died away; and Fonseker’s opinion of her and hers of him was now a matter of small moment. In any case, Fonseker was a nonentity. Gret had no use for a man—or a woman, either—who was led by another.

“I ’ll tell you what I ’ve been thinking,” observed Bobbie, seating himself gingerly on the rough edge of a log that for some reason or other had escaped the barker’s hands. Gret seated herself also as intimation that she had time to spare. “I ’ve decided that when the mill smashes up, closes down, or sells out, or whatever it does—”

“Sells out, I should think,” interposed Gret briefly.

“Well, if we can. That ’s what Fonseker said last night—that we ’d better close the thing up and try to sell it.”

Gret laughed. "You certainly can't sell it if you close it down. You might if you offered it as a going concern."

"I suppose so," agreed Bobbie, looking interested. "Of course, Fonseker was only thinking of losing no more money in it. If we do sell out, he says he will give me just as much of my money back as he possibly can. Then I shall send that straight home to mother."

"Mother a widow?" inquired Gret.

Bobbie nodded. "Yes. Very hard up at times, too—that is, to keep up necessary appearances, you know."

Gret had not the faintest idea what "necessary appearances" were, but concluded from Bobbie's tone that they were something imperative. And Bobbie, not troubled at any time with false pride or undue reserve concerning financial or family matters, least of all when, as in the present instance, he was attracted toward and felt confidence in a person, proceeded to impart his views.

"Well, as I was going to tell you, I've made up my mind that I won't go home even after the mill is gone. Hang it, I simply can't go and plant myself on the Mater again and expect her to keep me or find me something to do. I've done enough of that. So I'm going to try to work. Suppose I could get anything to do up here?"

"Of course," said Gret, in ready approval of the sentiment. "Why not? Dick will give you a job in our camp."

"I don't know anything about logging, you know," remarked Bobbie diffidently. "I would n't be much good—for a while anyway."

"No; but you'd learn. Dick is awfully good to teach the men. We've had lots of tenderfeet, some of them swells, too." She turned and her quick glance sought out the fine proportions of the foreman from among a group of men a little lower down on the skid-road. And

then, putting her hand horn-shaped over her lips, she shouted, "O—oh, Dick!"

Bobbie was staggered for a moment at the volume of the shout coming from this slim creature. But then he noted the broad, firm sweep of her chest, and laughed to himself. And Dick Swinton, turning with the rest of the men in the direction of the shout, saw the beckoning wave of Gret's hand, detached himself from the rest and approached obediently. He looked a trifle surprised to see the two in close converse.

"What is he in your camp?" inquired Bobbie before Dick was well within hearing.

"Foreman—boss, altogether," briefly. "Say, Dick," as that gentleman approached, "you could give this gentleman a job in the camp, could n't you?"

"Sure," replied he, running his keen blue eyes over the young man's well-knit figure.

"Then it would n't be long before you 'd be earning your three or three and a half a day," went on Gret encouragingly; "and all you have to pay out of that is four dollars a week board. The bunk is free."

"Sounds as if I 'd soon get rich that way," said Bobbie gaily.

"Mill going to bust up, then?" inquired Dick.

"Yes—from all indications. I imagine the fuse was laid long before I came," answered Bobbie frankly.

Dick smiled. "Yes, I guess so."

"Fonseker found out that all I said to him that time was true," remarked Gret with a triumphant nod to Dick; "but he says he never knew anything about what Transome said to me."

"Very likely not," said Dick coolly. "That was a mean son-of-a-gun, that Transome."

"Yes, you bet he was," agreed Gret heartily. "This gentleman's mother is a widow, and she just scraped up

all the money she could to set him up in business," she went on, indicating Bobbie, and by way of enlisting the practical Dick's sympathy in his behalf. "It 's too bad he should be sucked in the way he has been, is n't it?"

Dick nodded. "There was some changes made a little while before you came," addressing Bobbie. "Have n't they done any good?"

"Can't say whether they have or not. You see, I don't know the state of affairs before they were made," said Bobbie dryly. "But they must have been pretty bad if the present is an improvement."

"Pshaw! The men they 've got now are n't any better than the old ones. How is it going to be any better?" inquired Gret scornfully, addressing herself more particularly to Dick. "I 'll bet anything I could make that mill pay inside of three months."

Dick and Bobbie both laughed at the vehemence of the announcement.

"Well, then, you 'd better fix up some sort of a business deal with this gentleman," advised Dick jestingly. "Ask him how much he 'd pay for a manager."

"You could have half my share of the thing," said Bobbie, evidently not taking it as so much of a joke.

"Don't want any share. I 'd like to do it just for fun," with a thoughtful frown. She stood considering for a moment or so. "Say," addressing Bobbie, but laying a detaining hand on Dick's shirt-sleeve, as if afraid he might be inclined to walk away, "the mill 's sure to bust anyway, is n't it?"

"Don't see how it can help it," with engaging candor.

"Well, let me see—how much longer do you think it can be kept going?"

"Oh, a month or two, perhaps. There is some money yet to come from what orders they did manage to fill."

"Hum! Well—would you do everything I told you—

everything," inquired the girl with an impressive frown, "if I tried to help you out of the hole again?"

"Yes, indeed we will!" responded Bobbie quickly.

"And if I get men up from the Harbor, will you pay them just whatever I say?"

"Yes; positively."

"Perhaps Fonseker won't."

"I 'll pitch him in the river if he won't," savagely. He 's been fool enough already. But he 'll be glad to do it," he added confidently.

"All right. I 'll try." Her eyes narrowed and her nostrils dilated with the love of power and of a keen fight, that was born in her. "If it 's going to bust anyhow, I can but bust it a bit sooner. I don't know much more about running a shingle-mill than you do, but I know all those who do know."

"And where do you come in?" inquired Dick, keen for the welfare of his own.

"I don't know what Fonseker will do, of course," said Bobbie; "but half of all my profits shall be hers."

"Don't I tell you I don't want anything?" frowning heavily at the unabashed Dick. "I 'm just going to try my hand; that 's all. Besides, I hate to see you get left so badly," to Bobbie. "You come up here to-morrow afternoon—late, about five o'clock. Will you? And then I 'll tell you what I want to do. I 've got to go now. Oh, and say," turning back, "I remember, father told Dick it was no good getting orders for your mill. They were too long being filled, and the people got mad at him for sending them to you. So you write to father—Fonseker 's got his address—and tell him that you are the new partner, and that now things are going to hum. Tell him you 've got some of the finest shingle men on the Harbor, and that orders will be filled in your mill quicker than anywhere else. Ask him to get you some new cus-

tomers, and give him your word as to the delivery. See? He often has chances to send fine orders. Do that now—to-night."

Bobbie nodded in delighted acquiescence, and strode off to acquaint Fonseker with the new, and to his way of thinking, lucky turn in affairs. It was thoroughly characteristic of his simple, unbusinesslike nature—and also of Fonseker's, who took up the proposition with equal zest—that he turned over the working of the mill to a girl without a moment's hesitation.

Meanwhile Gret turned back to Dick. "Come along. Want to talk to you."

But Dick thrust both hands in his pockets and stood looking down on her. "What do you want to talk to me for? I 'm not in on this deal."

"Yes, you are—back of me," coolly. Then holding up her hand, and marking off the fingers on it. "I 'm going to get Dave Robnike from the American mill. He 's the finest weaver on this coast, is n't he?" Dick nodded. "Phew! You should see him. He does n't like the new foreman; he told me so. He 's getting three and a half a day now. He must have three seventy-five, or even four if he won't come without. Then I 'm going to have Ritchie out of the James & Dicksee mill—fine knot-sawyer, every one says—and Tom West, the bolter out of the Hartley-Barnes mill. And Dick, you tell them—"

"Now, Gret, see here," said Dick quietly, "you know very well that I can't have anything to do with no such work as that. These people all get lumber off us, and—my gracious! it would n't be fair to your father or anybody else."

Gret stared him squarely in the face. "I supposed you 'd use a little sense in the matter," she retorted scornfully. "That 's why I did n't set to work and tell you exactly *how* to say it. But if these men come into the

camp asking questions, what sort of mill it is, what sort of bosses and all that, I suppose you can tell them everything is all right, can't you?"

"Yes, I can do that."

"Well, then! You did n't suppose I was going to send you to sneak the men, did you?"

"Land, I did n't know," smiling, and still looking down on her in the greatest amusement. "You 're quite equal to it."

Gret laughed, too, good-humored once more. "Well, it 's like this, Dick: I 'm going to make that mill pay or die. Of course, I don't really know much more about running a shingle-mill than they do; only, I 'll use a little sense. But anything you tell me—help and advice and all that—goes in here," tapping her forehead, "and stays there. No one will know how much you put me wise."

Dick nodded. Presently he went back to his men, highly amused; and Gret went on her way deeply thoughtful.

After this treachery entered the mills down at the Harbor. But the proprietors never knew it was in the person of Silway's daughter, who came and sat on the benches during lunch-hour, chatting with various men. They were accustomed to seeing her, from a child up, walk about the mills whenever she felt inclined. But Gret heard all the men's grievances—having cautiously led the conversation up to the recital of them—and discussed their affairs with them with the utmost sympathy. And then she spoke words of wisdom.

"There 's a little mill up by our place—a dandy little mill it is. I tell you it is a regular snap working there. And the bosses are two of the nicest men you could hope to work for. I know them both. You come up to our camp, and the boys will tell you the same thing. What are you getting here—three and a half? Well, they 'd

give you three six bits, I know. They get swell orders, and crackerjack men is what they 're looking for. Ritchie and West are thinking about going up there. Come up to the camp to dinner to-night. I 'll tell Jake I asked you. And then, if you feel like it, you can just stroll down to the mill-house and talk to the bosses. No harm done, anyhow. Who 's to know?"

This performance was repeated for the benefit of each of the other men of her choice, and worked well in each instance. The men came up to the camp as suggested—though on different nights, by Gret's careful arrangement—and some of the main spokesmen of the camp, having previously learned of Gret's interest in the case, promptly and cheerfully went into ecstasies over both the mill and the angelic qualities of its owners. Gret sat by and listened stolidly; and then just as stolidly offered to conduct the men into the presence of the mill-owners.

Of course the men were hired, and started to work. But this was only the beginning of Gret's labors. Dick saw to it that only the finest logs went down to the mill, and Gret covertly watched the sawing up of almost each one and reported to Dick in order that full justice was done to the wood. Moreover, when the men were safely away from their former mills, and their places filled up, she talked with them again. Of course, if the mill would n't pay, Fonseker and Baring, with all their money, could hardly be expected to keep it going. But then it would pay. Why should n't it with such men? And the men certainly did work with a will. To add to their comfort, Gret had managed to have them board at her father's camp, being afraid that a journey to and from the Harbor night and morning would soon dampen their ardor. And Jake, who in any ordinary case would have kicked like fury at cooking for outside boarders, said not a word, but instead saw to it that many a little comfort came the

way of "Gret's boys," the source and cause of which they were far from suspecting. Jake felt very sure from what he saw of Baring and Fonseker—but Baring especially—that, if the mill could be got to pay, something handsome would come out of it for Gret.

The two young mill-owners were amazed at the lightning change that took place at the mill. They had not supposed it possible such a quantity of shingles could be turned out with the machinery at their command. The first week or so they were inclined to walk round, open-eyed, pleased astonishment written large on their faces—a proceeding to which Gret was quick to put a stop.

"Walk round and look wise, anyhow, even if you don't know anything," she advised tartly. And the two partners retired to do their marveling in secret.

In addition to writing to her father, Gret made Bobbie write to all previous mill customers and, explaining the rearrangement in the management of the mill, solicit a further trial of their product. A few orders were obtained in this way, which were immediately filled out of the store of shingles now accumulated, and filled so excellently that the original order was in almost every instance immediately repeated. For the first month the mill barely paid expenses; but at the end of the second month Bobbie Baring came to Gret and placed in her hands a longish envelop. She opened it curiously to find an account book with the Harbor bank, showing fifty dollars to her credit. She refused to take it, protesting that she had never thought of money compensation. But Bobbie was firm for once in his life.

"Yes, you will take it. I know you never thought of money. But it's only fair. It's half Fonseker's and half mine, and we're too grateful for words. Indeed, we are. Next month the profits will be more very likely," hopefully; "and you'll get half the profits of each."

"Well, I 'll take this," said Gret; "but I won't take half next month if you talk for a week. Besides, I should n't think you 'd need anyone much longer. You ought to know the business yourselves pretty soon. I show you just how it 's all done."

"I know you do. You 're awfully good and straightforward to us," agreed Bobbie gently. "And I—we—may learn the business all right; but we 'll never learn to manage men as you do."

Gret laughed and sped on her way, well pleased, as was but natural, at the frank and genuine praise. She went at once to show Dick what the mill-owners had done, and that gentleman was of the opinion that they had just done what was right.

"It 's yours; you earned it well enough. And I 'm glad they did the square thing by you."

"Oh, I did n't do so very much," said Gret modestly.

"You did n't leave much undone, either," said the foreman with a smile; "that 's a sure thing."

Gret said no more, but she went down to the Harbor next day, drew a sum of money out of the bank and purchased for Dick a most elaborate scarf-pin, and for Jake a pair of cuff-links. These she presented with honeyed words of flattery.

"I could n't have done anything, now, if it had n't been for you two. So don't say a word."

She also ordered up into Jake's keeping a keg of beer; and that night the camp held a jamboree and toasted the mill, and agreed that the owners were first-rate fellows, who should n't be done up again while any of the camp members were by to help. Gret's diplomacy and business acumen were lauded to the skies, and every one was well pleased all the way round.

After that things began to go on oiled wheels. Bobbie wrote home in the highest spirits, and began to return in

steady amounts the money lent him. He wisely, however, made no mention of Gret's existence, knowing full well that his anxious mother would instantly suspect an awful entanglement.

By and by Mr. Silway came home again for a time. He soon learned, as he was bound to do, of Gret's mysterious and not very well understood connection with the mill. At first he was enraged, as he generally was at anything new concerning his family, and declared he was n't going to have Gret's name mixed up with that of those two fellows. Gret herself said nothing; but she treated her father to one of those peculiar, unblinking stares of hers, and then walked off. She could not have expressed herself better if she had talked for a month.

However, upon inquiry Mr. Silway found that in reality Gret seemed to be doing little more than bossing and meddling about the mill, much as she did about their own camp; and when he became better acquainted with Bobbie, he could not but admit that the two young mill-proprietors were undoubtedly gentlemen and very nice fellows. Gret might do worse than marry either of them; in fact, she was more than liable to do very much worse. And anyway, Gret left alone was no trouble, while Gret crossed might be goodness knows what. So with remarkable wisdom, for him, he let the subject drop.

The possibility that Gret might marry one of the mill-owners was discussed in several quarters—always well out of Gret's hearing, it may be remarked. Among those loud in disfavor of such an idea were Oly, Jake and Robin.

"Pshaw! they don't know enough. Gret's not going to marry anybody that she can tote around at the end of a string."

It may be supposed that such talk as this, connecting, as it did in a way, Gret's name with those of the young mill men would rouse a feeling of jealousy in the breast

of Robin Start. But it did not; far from it. Robin was no suppliant for Gret's favor. That young lady had changed very materially in her attitude toward the chum of her childhood. Following that escapade of now nearly two years ago, Gret had seemingly viewed Robin in a new and apparently ludicrous light. For a time she never lost an opportunity of making fun of him, and she watched him, when in her presence, with an amused mockery in her eyes that was not pleasant to either his self-respect or vanity. Instead of looking forward to it, Robin grew to dread lest at any time it should suit Gret's purpose to disclose her new estate. For a long time he did not dare mention the subject to her; but once, many months thereafter, he timidly referred to it.

"Suppose we 'll ever do anything with that business of ours—you know—that day at Montyville?"

Gret looked at him in cool surprise. "Of course not. I never think about it. Just the same to me as if it had never been done."

"But supposing it ever came out," hazarded Robin.

Gret leaned her elbows on the rock, and regarded her companion with that uncomfortable, unwavering gaze. "Why, I should just say that you persuaded me into it, and that I did n't know anything about it until I was on the boat; my parents did n't know anything about it; I was n't of proper age, and you 'd just get kicked out. That 's all there 'd be to it."

Robin gasped. "Why, how could you be so mean?"

"I would n't," coolly. "I should never say anything about it. If you do, you know what to expect. It was only a fool trick, anyhow. Nothing legal about it."

"Well, we 'll let it go at that," said Robin relieved. "It was never done."

"Of course. It was only a matter of a few words, anyway. I never think about it."

And that was true. She did n't. And Robin was glad to come to her way of thinking. His craze to take his place in the community as a married man had worn off. He could not see that Jack Gradel got any more consideration, and he certainly was getting a whole lot less comfort. Robin never could go near the Gradel cabin but his ears were assailed by the squalls of an infant. The advent of a family naturally made more work for Mary, and as that ambitious young woman had married to escape work, not to make it, she was not turning out a very good wife. As far as Robin could see, Jack had nothing but wrangles and discomfort. He was very glad to escape a like predicament, and came in time to see and realize how childishly rash and foolish he had been. And he really came to look upon the affair, as Gret said, in the light of a youthful escapade with nothing serious or legal about it; and as such it lapsed most of the time into the limbo of forgotten things.

THE winter passed away, and spring came again. And then Bobbie Baring grew restless. He bethought himself of the yachting parties, gay times at the beaches and continental trips; and longed for a sight of, and converse with, his own. And presently he wrote to his mother, observing that he did not see why he should not leave the mill for a time to Fonseker and come home for a holiday.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PILGRIMAGE TO THE BACKWOODS

“AND so,” Mrs. Baring was saying impressively, “I must think very carefully over what I shall write, so as to persuade Bobbie to stand by his post, without seeming harsh or unfeeling, you know.”

Maude Vibart nodded. “Have you told Vines that you are to be left alone?”

“Yes. I ’m not at home to any one,” placidly.

“Not to any one?” repeated Maude with an inflection.

“Oh well, he knows I ’m never out to Errol or Lily or any one like that,” replied Mrs. Baring.

“You ’re expecting your nephew, the major, to come and confer with you on the question of Bobbie’s visit, are n’t you?” asked Maude in a carefully casual tone.

“Well, he said he would get here if he could,” responded Mrs. Baring discontentedly. “But Mrs. Hall-Turner had him on her coach this morning. “It ’s perfectly disgusting the way those women run after him.”

Miss Vibart smiled absently. Maude had been guilty of an act of folly. In the midst of a life that had been reason, all reason, cool, calculating business reason, she had done an utterly foolish and impractical thing. She had fallen in love—and in an impossible quarter.

The man was the impracticable part of the affair, everything else being more than satisfactory. From his father he inherited a fine old English name and estates; and from his mother, an American woman, one of the most beautiful of Californian estates; his income was enor-

mous, and he did not spend half of it. But as far as the man himself was concerned Maude might as well have fallen in love with the pope.

Maude knew all this. She was no fool, neither was she conceited. A man who had been the target of every match-making mother for six or seven years at least, in continental cities and at home, and who had yet to be even associated with the name of a woman, was not likely to be attracted by anything a woman like herself had to offer. No—Maude's only hope, if she had one, was to be found in an opinion once expressed by Mrs. Baring, his aunt on the maternal side. The opinion was not stated to Maude in particular, but was merely a statement in general.

"Errol will never fall in love, my dear. Don't imagine it for a moment. It is simply not in him. He will have to marry sometime, of course, because he will never let Ketton go to strangers. But when he does it will be to some woman willing to marry him without love and courtship or anything of that kind."

Maude would have married him on any terms. To do her justice, she would gladly have married him if he had been unknown and penniless—so great and entire was her one act of folly. It was unprecedented; it never would be duplicated. It was just as well that it was wholehearted.

Apparently "those women" allowed Major Ludlowe a brief respite, for in the middle of the afternoon he appeared, towing after him into the boudoir the tall and slender figure of Arthur Massinger, one of the city's most prominent young ministers and a former college friend of Ludlowe's. He was giving up his life to helping the "unfortunates" of San Francisco.

"Mrs. Baring, this is an intrusion," began the young minister; "but—"

"Errol did it," finished that gentleman, turning round from greeting the serene Maude. "I found him wandering the streets, and brought him here to you to be lectured. Just look at that face, aunt." Placing his hand on the man's shoulder, and gently turning toward that attentive lady the worn, white face and hollow, bright eyes.

"It 's no good my saying anything, if a glance in his glass is not sufficient," said Mrs. Baring impressively. "That gives all the warning there is to be given."

"No, don't scold, Mrs. Baring," said Massinger, drawing a chair near his hostess. "I am warned by the doctor. I have to go away for a rest."

"I should think so. Where are you going?" inquired Mrs. Baring.

"I don't know," thoughtfully.

"And don't care, eh?" asked Ludlowe.

"Oh, not much," gently. "Wherever is most advisable from a health point of view, I suppose."

"And worry about your charity work the whole time you are away, I know," observed Miss Vibart.

"Oh, no. That must cease while I 'm gone; that 's all," calmly. "The only thing that worries me at all is the fact that I have at present three girls at 'The Tents.' They can't be turned away; and I find it so difficult to get a good woman to look after them."

You would, of course," agreed Mrs. Baring, innocent of any intent to offend. "You could hardly expect a good woman to be willing to come in contact with them."

Arthur Massinger smiled slightly. Where the vital questions of his life were concerned he was a man of few words. He was not fool enough to suppose that with a few words, however well-chosen, he could upset in his day the ideas that custom and convention had been weaving for generations. No—time and independent right-

eous lives might do it. He could not, and was not going to waste time and precious energy trying.

Meanwhile Mrs. Baring produced Bobbie's letter, read it, unfolded her views, and looked very wise and impressive.

"You know how very impressionable Bobbie is," she observed. "He never could be here a whole summer without getting interested in—in something or other. And I know he never would go back before the summer was over, perhaps not even then. He never will get another money-making chance like this—right away up there, too, where it does not really matter what one does."

"No. At the same time he is evidently tired of rustivating for the present, and wants a change," said Ludlowe. "If he has made up his mind to come, come he will."

"That's what I think," agreed Maude.

"That is Bobbie's way," added Massinger with a smile.

"Oh, but he must n't!" said Mrs. Baring in a distressed way.

"Well, there's only one way of stopping it," observed Ludlowe, disposing of the matter in his usual cool way.

"What is that?" asked Mrs. Baring quickly.

"Go up to him."

"Oh!" Mrs. Baring gasped. Then she sat staring at her unmoved nephew as she took in the full import of the proposal. It would, of course, save the expense of a whole summer—the outfit, the beaches and the yachting—and she could have the house redecorated. But then, there was Maude. For the past two years it had suited the wealthy Miss Vibart to be chaperoned by Mrs. Baring, who was socially so prominent. And then—there was Major Ludlowe.

In return for her chaperonage Mrs. Baring received regularly a handsome check. If it meant losing her

checks— She glanced furtively up. Maude was watching her keenly, divining perfectly well what was in her mind.

"It 's such a long journey alone," she said tentatively.

"Don't take it alone, then," advised Ludlowe promptly. He, too, was perfectly cognizant of all the ins and outs of the case. "If you think you can take to camping and roughing it philosophically and not grumble at the various specimens of insect life sharing the daily round with you, I should like to come myself."

"I think I should, too," added Maude, quietly. "I can't promise not to mind the insects, but I 'll promise not to express my feelings in words."

"That is all that would be required," said Ludlowe. "Well, that will be the very thing, aunt. If you could really get— Why, aunt—Massinger, this is just what you want. Aunt, we must have Arthur. You could n't choose a better trip for your case," turning to the young man. "The air in those pine woods is the finest possible thing for you!"

"Yes; Errol is right," approved Mrs. Baring, instantly perceiving that Arthur Massinger was quite the most safe and harmless adjunct to the party possible. "And we shall be most delighted to have you join us. What do you think of it?"

"Why— If you 're sure I should n't be intruding," began Massinger, slightly bewildered at the sudden development of plans in his behalf. "I did rather dread the idea of taking a trip alone."

"Well, then, we 'll consider it settled," said Mrs. Baring sweetly. "What had we better do first, Errol?"

"Wire to Bobbie," replied Ludlowe promptly. "Else the young gentleman will be following his letter without further ado."

"Oh, dear me, yes, to be sure," agreed Mrs. Baring

readily. "I should never have thought of that. I shall just tell him that my health is not quite so good as it might be—it is n't, you know—and so we 've formed a little party to spend the summer with him—part of it, anyway. And we 'll say he need not go to any expense or trouble to accommodate us. We can do with what he can. And we 'll say—"

"I 'll send the wire some time this afternoon myself," interposed Ludlowe, not without a smile at the proposed length of it. "So you need not trouble about that. And I 'll look up trains and boat connections as far as possible. All you ladies have to do is to tuck away your wardrobes as soon as possible."

And so it was settled. Ludlowe despatched a telegram that was a considerable abbreviation of his aunt's text. It merely ran, "Vibart, Ludlowe, Massinger and I coming up. Will wire from Portland. Mother."

"That gives the young man no time for prevarication or change of plans," he remarked to Massinger, who had accompanied him. "When he receives this he 'll suppose we 're actually embarking and be dumbfounded."

"Naturally," laughed Massinger. "Who would n't be?"

Both men were right in their prophecies. Bobbie, receiving the telegram by special messenger up from the Harbor, was literally stunned for the moment. Then came a feeling of disappointment, almost of resentment, that his own proposed trip was now out of the question. And then, finally, picturing his mother out among his present surroundings, Bobbie became filled with glee. Flourishing the telegram, he rushed into the mill and waved it in the face of the astounded Fonselker. That gentleman was horrified.

"My dear fellow, what shall we do with them?" he inquired feebly.

"Stow them all away somewhere, of course," said Bob-

bie. "We must build more rooms onto our shack; that 's all."

"But—this sounds as if they were already on the way," argued Fonseker, staring blankly at his friend.

"Oh, just about to start, I expect. We 've got about a week in which to fix things up. Say, where 's Gret? We must tell her."

"She was here a minute ago," said Fonseker, glancing round, "talking to— There she is," indicating a boat on its way up the river.

Bobbie gave a shrill, prolonged whistle, and, as Gret paused and turned her head, waved the telegram in excited circles above him. After staring hard over her shoulder for a moment or so, Gret decided something out of the ordinary had evidently occurred, turned her boat into the bank, tied it up and climbed out. Fonseker and Bobbie went forward to meet her, and as they drew together Bobbie handed over in weighty and dramatic silence the message of import.

Gret read it, laughed, and then demanded, even as Fonseker had done, "Well, where are you going to put them?"

"Why," began Bobbie, placing both hands in his pockets and planting himself very firmly on the soft moss, "I 'm going to build two more bedrooms. And then I 'll put carpet on the floors, and—oh, I 'll fix the place up regardless. You 'll see! But Lord, Fonseker, fancy the Mater among all this!" And Bobbie danced around, and chuckled in unfilial glee.

Fonseker looked far more concerned than the approaching lady's own son. "Even with the best you can do, I 'm afraid Mrs. Baring will find it awfully rough."

"Rough! She 'll imagine the Fiji Islander on his mat under the cocoanut-tree is not in it with her for a savage life! Of course, Errol has been hunting all over the

Rockies. He knows pretty well what life in the backwoods is like. Besides, he 's such a cool customer. You can't upset him, anyway. Miss Vibart, too, seems to take things all serenely. I don't know so much about Mas-singer. Seems an awfully nice fellow—but—"

"Clergyman, is n't he?" interposed Fonseker.

"Yes; not a bit preachy-preachy, though. I don't imagine he 'll care how rough it is. Mother is the one it 'll pinch."

"Oh, well! She 'll hardly expect the comforts of civilization in the backwoods."

"No—oh, no!" with a grin. "She 'll have made up her mind to do without a maid, and I don't suppose she 'll be surprised to find us without a butler. But—when it comes to Anna, you know, and all that—" Bobbie was overcome with amusement and could specialize no further.

Fonseker nodded. At the same time he looked at Bobbie with a smile, the cause of which that gentleman was far from guessing. It had just occurred to Fonseker that among other things up in the great Northwest calculated to shock Mrs. Baring might be the change which even so short a time had effected in her son. And so he looked at that worthy, standing hands in pockets, feet planted widely apart, hair on end in front and cap set well on the back of the head, and laughed. Of course Bobbie was just the same jolly, happy-go-lucky fellow that he had always been, only—well, he had taken to the free, rollicking life of the West like a duck to water.

Gret stood considering matters, too; only not of course from anything like Fonseker's standpoint. She was just trying to size up in imagination the prospective arrivals. Suddenly she decided it was a foolish waste of effort, and kicked a piece of bark into the river by way of signaling a change of thought.

This brought Bobbie, too, out of his reflections.

"Well," he observed briskly, "I 'm going down to the Harbor to see about a carpenter, and the carpets and all that. Any of you boys want to come?"

"I would n't go until I had found out which was the best carpenter, and until I had formed some definite idea of what I wanted. Would you, Miss Silway?" said Fonsaker, with a distinct air of pride in his own increasing business acumen.

"I would n't go down to the Harbor at all," responded Gret coolly. "Rob Marco, down in the gulch, is as good a carpenter as you 'd want, and I believe you can shape the lumber in the mill. Ask the sawyer. And Marco will tell you how much you want, and what kind, and all that."

"That would be a good idea, would n't it?" agreed Bobbie brightly.

"And I would n't go down to the Harbor for the carpets, either," went on Gret. "They 're the awfullest things: great bunches of flowers all over them, the kind that nobody ever saw growing under the sun. Send a letter to father, and ask him to go to one of the furniture stores and tell them to send you what you need."

"But they 'd take so long to get hère, would n't they? Could they come at all, do you think?" asked Bobbie anxiously.

"Come? Why not? Only takes three or four days. Be here before you had the rooms ready."

"Well, but I don't know what size carpets I shall have to have, you see," objected Bobbie.

"Why not?" demanded Gret. "The carpenter will know how large he 's going to build the rooms, won't he? What 's the matter with you? Come along. Let 's go hunt the carpenter."

That worthy craftsman was soon found, and then they came back to swell the consultation by the addition of Dick Swinton and the sawyer out of the mill. With the

combined aid and advice of all these the size and location of the rooms was soon settled. Three extra rooms were decided upon, one of which Bobbie intended for a sitting-room for the ladies.

"They can't very well sit in the room that we dine in, and all that," he remarked.

Then the carpenter and the sawyer departed to get things under way at once, and to Bobbie and his confrères was left the task of settling the furniture question.

"I know exactly what to put in the room for Errol and Massinger," said Bobbie; "but I 'll be hanged if I know how to set up a ladies' room. Do you, Fonseker?"

"Well, you have to have a dressing-table affair, with a large mirror, and an aperture for their knees to fit in when they sit down," began Fonseker sagely, speaking in much the same way as if he were describing a cage for some rare animal of peculiar habits.

"Yes; and then, as there 's no dressing-room, we 'll have to have a— Good gracious!" Bobbie looked tragic. "What will they do for a bath?"

This settled the listening Gret. Her scorn of the totally unnecessary requirements of the coming women had been increasing as time went on.

"Pshaw!" she broke in. "Bath! Are n't there plenty of wash-tubs in the kitchen?"

Fonseker and Baring broke into shouts of laughter. "Is that what you do, Gret?"

"Not in the kitchen," responded Gret sturdily, but smiling in spite of herself at sight of their unfeigned mirth. "How do you bathe, then?"

"Yes—we have to use a tub, of course," admitted Bobbie, trying to control his face.

"Oh, well," put in Dick, "these ladies know they 're coming out into the woods. They won't expect no first-class New York hotel."

"Do you know the size of all the carpets?" demanded Gret.

"No—we must measure the dining-room," answered Bobbie quickly. "The carpenter's going to make the other rooms fourteen feet square."

A procession formed and repaired to the dining-room, where Bobbie proceeded to measure the floor by striding across it with uncertain gait and pronouncing it to be "about thirteen feet."

"About," echoed Gret in amazement at such methods. "Suppose your carpet came 'about' a foot too small. You 'd look fine, would n't you?" She returned to the broadly smiling Dick, a request on her lips. It was not necessary to utter it, however, for that gentleman quietly drew from a capacious hip pocket a folding foot-rule.

Gret took it, and with characteristic unconcern dropped onto her knees, and in that position measured off the floor under the supervising eye of Dick Swinton. It was discovered to be thirteen feet six inches one way, and thirteen feet ten inches the other.

"Quite a difference," remarked Bobbie blandly.

"You bet; and that 's just what you 'd have thought when the carpet came according to your measuring."

"Well, I have got to go," said Dick, and with a cheerful nod to the group he walked off to the camp.

The remaining three got pen, ink and paper and sat down to indite the all-important epistle. Bobbie, the scribe, sat in the middle, with Gret and Fonseker on either side. And faithfully and conscientiously did the girl ransack her memory to enumerate all that could be reasonably demanded, according to her way of thinking.

As Bobbie clapped everything down on paper as soon as it was mentioned, afterward amending it according to consultation, the list when finally completed was complicated in the extreme. One thing only was plain, and

that was the need for immediate despatch. Then the three decided that a fitting end to such an expeditious business transaction would be to row down to the Harbor and see themselves that the letter was safely mailed. Which was accordingly done. After which the committee, as Bobbie called it, returned home and retired to its several couches, worn out with the strenuous mental and physical endeavors of the day.

The extra rooms were completed in three days, being but roughly built, of course, in accordance with the rest of the house. And on the fifth day the consignment of furniture arrived from Portland. Then followed times of the wildest excitement while the goods were hauled up from the boat and installed in what was considered to be their rightful places by the committee, aided by a push here and a pat there by the Unutterable Anna, as Bobbie had long since dubbed her.

Many were the anxious discussions and more or less stormy arguments before all was said and done; but finally the last piece of furniture, beaming with polish and newness, was tugged into its place, and then the committee sat down and pronounced its work very good.

Almost all the camp, which felt a sort of proprietorship in the young mill-owners, came down to view their enlarged residence. And as all the display and effort was for the benefit of the mother of one of them, it was commended and admired, where it would otherwise undoubtedly have been condemned as showing a desire to adopt airs.

Then when all was done that could be done, and seen that could be seen, both committee and community awaited with impatience the arrival of the distinguished guests.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. BARING MEETS THE "CAMP-GIRL"

MRS. BARING enjoyed her trip to Portland, and descended to greatly admire that city upon looking it over. A wire was sent to Bobbie to join the party there, as they purposed remaining a few days before starting on the final stages of the journey. Ludlowe wanted to purchase a launch, and he thought it advisable to learn from Bobbie a few particulars of the waters upon which it would be required to run. So Bobbie came, and Mrs. Baring's cup of complacency was full. To be sure, there was a sort of slap-dash air about the young man which jarred slightly on a cultured understanding; but Mrs. Baring reflected that this was hardly to be wondered at. And as Bobbie, impressed himself by his temporary return to civilization, was on his most careful and best behavior, all went well.

But alas, a change came o'er the spirit of the scene when at Sooginaw Junction they boarded the little local train that was one of the various links in the journey which would eventually land them at Quellish Harbor. Here was no Pullman, but just one common car into which all—all—entered! Mrs. Baring's face lost its contented serenity, and a look of thinly veiled horror and disgust appeared, which, by the way, no one seemed to notice.

At Granite Harbor they all went on board the little steamer which was the next link on the way, and here conditions were even worse. It was either a matter of

standing out on deck or herding in the one small, stuffy cabin with all and everything on the boat. Fortunately the weather was pleasant; and Mrs. Baring was able to keep on deck, safely glued to the side of one or other of her party. She observed how Ludlowe and Massinger were accosted by men who generally seemed to evince immediate interest and curiosity as to the date of their arrival in those parts and the probable length of their stay, and felt that she would faint if subjected to a like indignity. However, luck and an unprepossessing expression saved her this last straw; and finally, after many changes and tribulations, the party arrived at Quellish. Here they were met by Bertie Fonseker, who was still, Mrs. Baring reflected with a little inward sigh of relief, his own gentle, aristocratic self.

Mrs. Baring boarded the *Transfer* in trepidation of spirit. "Is it safe?" she inquired anxiously, surveying with distrust the flat, barge-like deck that was almost level with the water.

"Hope so," responded Bobbie blandly. "All we have to get up and down the river on!" And so Mrs. Baring resigned herself with a little hopeless sigh to fate and the *Transfer*.

The other members of the party were all greatly interested in the journey up the river, at the various landings and the still more various specimens that appeared upon them. Mrs. Baring noted with amazement that Bobbie was frequently hailed with great familiarity, and grieved a little to think that he had not, in consideration of his position as mill-owner, preserved a greater show of dignity among the natives—as she mentally termed the unsuspecting dwellers on the Wishkah.

As the *Transfer* was within a few minutes' run of Silway's landing, a scene typical of their new home appeared. Round the bend of the river floated a raft of

splendid logs, and on it in one of her fine, dare-devil poses was the redoubtable Gret. In a boat tied to the tail of the raft was Oly, lolling in a state of complete abandon.

As the raft bore down upon them, swinging sharply with the newly-turned tide, the *Transfer* scuffed hastily off into backwater. One of the wide, triangular sides of the raft touched her, however, and then, as if shuddering at the contact, rippled the whole of its sinuous length. Gret swayed like a willow in a wind-storm, and with about as much ease; but Mrs. Baring was horrified.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she cried. "That girl will be drowned."

"Pooh, not she!" said Bobbie, rushing to the side of the *Transfer* and waving his cap. "It 's Gret. Hello, Gret! I 've got 'em—see!" with a wave of his hand toward the astonished group behind him.

Mrs. Baring was perfectly scandalized. "My dear!" she gasped.

Bobbie turned an innocent face over his shoulder. "What? Oh! Oh, pooh, mother; you 're in the backwoods now, not in Golden Gate Park."

"I know. Still, you should preserve a slight semblance of—of—" Mrs. Baring saved herself the trouble of specifying what, for Bobbie had already begun to explain to his interested friends the progress of the log from the tree to the raft. "Who is that girl—what do you call her—Gret?" she inquired then, during a momentary pause in Bobbie's discourse.

"Big camp above us—Silway's—where we get our logs," said Bobbie in a rapid aside, and then resumed his discussion of the intricacies of logging.

Mrs. Baring did not listen, not being particularly interested in logging processes, but stood surveying the passing banks of the river with a certain dismal, tired expression of countenance. She saw no beauty in their

overhanging luxuriousness, and found nothing of interest, but much of distaste, in the life that was just being introduced to her. For that reason her soul was tired and jaded within her.

When at last the Baring-Fonseker establishment was reached, Mrs. Baring was so glad to find herself once more sheltered from the gaze of a seemingly vastly interested public, that she made no comment on the appearance of her new home, but sat down and smiled weakly. This was taken by the happily indiscriminating Bobbie to betoken unqualified satisfaction, and he dilated to his audience upon the rapid and clever way in which they had all turned to and, as he expressed it, "fixed things." Ludlowe and Massinger, having really some idea of what had been accomplished, gave liberal and unstinted praise, and both proprietors beamed with satisfaction. Then the guests retired to their apartments to refresh themselves and perform an impromptu dinner toilet; while Bobbie strolled round with his hands in his pockets, went into the kitchen and comforted the expectant Anna, and exchanged views with Bertie.

The dinner passed off without any serious break in the serenity of the social atmosphere, although Mrs. Baring was secretly horrified both at the meal and the serving thereof. She vowed to change matters as soon as she could grasp the situation well enough to know where she stood. While Anna, having no conception whatever of the relationship of the modern lady of the house and her servant, was immediately indignant at receiving no greeting and being completely ignored, and signaled her displeasure by serving the next course with a decided sniff. Mrs. Baring was amazed afresh.

"What an uncouth girl! I must see about changing her as soon as I understand anything about housekeeping in these parts."

"Well, if you do, that 's just where your trouble will begin," said Bobbie with a warning nod of the head. "Anna 's a peach as girls go out here."

"A what?" inquired Mrs. Baring.

"A peach," repeated Bobbie unconcernedly. "I thought just as you do when I first came up. But now I know different. Bertie knows, don't you, Bert?" appealing to that gentleman.

"Yes, indeed; Anna is very desirable as domestics go in these parts," coincided Bertie gently. "Most of them are ignorant Swedish or Norwegian girls, straight from the cabins or from the old country. But we have succeeded in giving Anna a few general ideas as to how things should be done."

"Good gracious me!" said Mrs. Baring, trying to realize such a hopeless state of affairs.

Bobbie grinned in open lack of sympathy, and the rest of the assembly smiled more or less overtly. But Mrs. Baring looked blank during the rest of the meal, and conversation flourished without any further contribution on her part.

The greater part of the following day was spent by the two women in disposing of their effects as well as might be in such accommodations and receptacles as were to hand. Probably both were a trifle appalled at the life that for the next few months lay before them; but neither uttered a word of complaint or apprehension. To each one contemplation of the original motive was solace enough. Mrs. Baring thought of a recouped bank-account and redecorated house, and Maude reflected on three months' matchless opportunity to be near Ludlowe and to demonstrate her worth as a cheerful and sensible companion through any and all circumstances. No woman had a better chance with a man than was before her now, she knew—thrown into daily companionship,

with no other woman about to attract or divert attention. Of course, Gret did not count!

As for the men, their simpler wardrobes were soon disposed of, and they sallied forth to be shown round by the attentive hosts. During the performance of this hospitable duty, Bobbie remarked with surprise that Gret was nowhere to be seen. As it happened, that young lady was exceedingly busy upon this particular day. A raft went down to the mills, logs were taken up into the boom, and logs came down the skid-road; and though anxious to inspect the new arrivals at close range, yet Gret wisely reflected that, interesting though they undoubtedly were, they would be there every day for her inspection, whereas every day did not offer for her delectation such a stirring program as this one. Therefore she was invisible for the better part of the day.

In the evening, however, just before shutting-down time, Dick sent her down to the mill with a message to the bolter. It was also just a little before the Barings' dinner-hour, and Mrs. Baring, her arrangements for the day completed and having nothing particular to do, strolled across to the mill in search of Bobbie, of whom she had not so far seen very much. She reached the building, and entered gingerly over the sawdust-strewn threshold. Standing just inside was Gret. Mrs. Baring's eyes fell on her immediately, and her lips took on a decidedly supercilious curve, as she lifted her dainty skirts, and stood hesitating whether or not to enter further. And then, seeing that Gret did not shrink away in a properly obsequious manner, she gave that enterprising little lady an inquiring glance of arrogance. What was this camp-girl doing here in her son's mill? Waiting for him to appear, she supposed. This kind of girl was brazen enough for anything. These reflections and more were expressed in the august lady's stare.

As for Gret, she in turn surveyed the visitor with a cool, unwavering interest that was considerably tinged with amusement. She was just wondering whether this was the lady's natural expression. If it were, Gret considered her unfortunate, especially as long as she remained on the Wishkah.

Presently, enraged at the general lack of respect displayed in the looks of those about her, Mrs. Baring turned and, with an expression of more pronounced disgust than ever on her countenance, departed the way she had come. As she disappeared a roar of laughter went round the mill, whose hands had been to a man interested spectators of the dumb pantomime just enacted. Faint strains of this mirth reached Mrs. Baring's ears as she stepped carefully and daintily on her way, and did not tend to restore her good humor. And she did not forget to voice her indignation as they all gathered round the dinner-table.

"I went across to the mill this afternoon," she said with an air of severity and addressing Bobbie more particularly; "and that camp-girl was there. What does she want, hanging about the mill in that way?"

Both Bobbie and Bertie looked amazed, and it took Bobbie fully a minute to grasp his mother's meaning.

"Do you mean Gret?" he inquired open-eyed.

"I think you did call her by some such name—yes."

Bobbie's indignation was immediate, unfeigned and undisguised. "How idiotic to talk in such a way, mother! Camp-girl! Why her father owns that camp, and acres and acres of timber—in fact, about all this timber round about us. We have to pay him for every log we get into our mill. You bet, you wish you owned as much!"

Mrs. Baring was secretly a little astonished. But she would not show it.

"That may be. Nevertheless, I fail to see what she can want in the mill. No nice girl would want to hang about a place full of rough men. But she certainly looks brazen enough for anything."

"Well, she is n't!" almost shouted Bobbie, filial courtesy quite forgotten in righteous indignation. "There 's no nicer girl living. She 's a girl that no fellow would dream of saying anything to that was n't just so. None of her father's men, and none of our men either, ever say anything out of the way before her. Do they, Bert?"

"No," corroborated that gentleman in his quiet way. "She is quite nice, really, Mrs. Baring. You would be surprised if you were to know her, really."

"I have no desire to improve the acquaintanceship," observed Mrs. Baring sarcastically.

"Don't trouble," said Bobbie with equal sarcasm. "You won't get the chance. I can see that. There 's only one good thing—Gret 's too sensible a girl to take any notice of the ridiculous way you act toward her. Otherwise she 'd make things jolly uncomfortable for us."

"Really!" Mrs. Baring was offended, both at Bobbie's tone and the sentiments expressed. "How can she possibly affect your comfort?"

"You 'd soon see," grimly. "She manages the mill practically."

Mrs. Baring looked astonished and indignant at this assertion; and the rest of the assembly, who had so far been more or less amused, looked surprised also.

"What nonsense are you talking, Bobbie?" demanded Mrs. Baring then. "What are you two men here for, then?"

"To draw the money," laconically. "Oh now, you can all look incredulous, but it 's true. Bertie can tell you. The mill was just bound to smash—and smash badly—when I got here. Is n't that so, Bertie?"

Bertie looked slightly confused, but nevertheless bent his head in corroboration of the damaging statement.

"You bet it was!" went on Bobbie, indignant still and forgetful of the discomfort he might be causing his friend. "Bertie did n't know a thing about running a shingle-mill; neither did I. And there is a whole lot to know. Gret had told the other fellow, Transome, at the start just what mistakes they were making, but he would n't listen to her. So he drew out in time to escape the smash. But when I came she was sorry for me, and offered to do what she could to help. And she just actually took the mill right over, for a time, and you see how she pulled it out of the mud. If you don't believe me, ask Bertie here. He 'll tell you the same thing, and perhaps you 'll believe him."

"I am not doubting your statements," said his mother, still in an offended tone; "but it 's certainly difficult to realize why two men should not be able to do as much as a mere girl."

"I don't see why it 's difficult. Anyhow, it 's so," responded Bobbie decidedly. "The explanation is easy enough. There is n't a man down at the Harbor connected with the timber trade but knows her; there is n't a man or woman in all this locality up here but knows her, too. And there is n't one of them would see her make a mistake. She went down to the Harbor and fetched out of those mills there the best men there were to be had; she got only the finest lumber out of her father's camp; and she watched over this mill of ours day and night almost. And then her father sent us lots of orders from the city."

"Oh, well! Of course, I can understand that benefiting you," allowed Mrs. Baring, referring to the last clause in her son's statement.

"Her father sent the orders just the same before Gret

had anything to do with the mill," said Bobbie quickly; "but they were n't filled rightly. Well, anyway," with an air of dismissing the subject, "it does n't make any difference what you think of Gret. Only if you offend her you offend all the locality, for it's most of it connected with the camp in some way or other."

"What a pity I did n't know all this a little sooner," remarked Mrs. Baring with gentle sarcasm, "so that, on seeing her, I could have made obeisance."

Bobbie laughed, his usual good humor returning. "All right. You 'll see," he said. And therewith resigned his mother to her fate.

As for Gret, she was perfectly unconcerned over what was to her merely an episode of passing amusement. She did not even mention the matter to the camp, whither she returned to supper. Instead, being tired with the long day's activity, she went early to bed and forgot it all in sound, dreamless sleep.

In the morning she awoke with the sweet May sunshine full in her eyes. She sprang up with that eager, glad resumption of life that is one of the greatest gifts of a sound body and clear mind, and dressed in her usual rapid way. She descended the bluff in break-neck style, sprang into the boat, and was up in the camp before the men were well out of their bunks. And then, when breakfast was over, and the men turned to, she decided to go down to the mill for a while. She would make it her business to see that peculiar woman again. She would see the other three arrivals, too, and learn what they were like.

She struck out in a bee-line from the camp to the path down the river. Down in the hollows and up on the bluffs she went, her feet too light to walk or do anything but dance. She was like a young animal, intoxicated with the beauty of the earth and life and living.

On one of the uprisings of the path she stood a moment. A strong breath of the morning rose to her nostrils and she breathed it in—the warm, rich earth smell, that vibrating down some animal cord that fold on fold of evolution has not effaced, can stir always the pulse of those reared close to nature. Gret breathed it in, and her breast swelled with the volume of it. It ran down her veins like wine, and she stared before her into many-colored vistas like a dazed thing, carried out of herself by something hypnotic and potential rising out of the earth to her. And just for a moment she did not notice Ludlowe, walking slowly up the path toward her.

Ludlowe examined Gret with critical eyes, both on account of what Bobbie had said and because of something oddly striking in her appearance. She was very interesting, this woman-creature out of another world. She was not pretty—not in a conventional way. There was something quaint and taking about her face; that was all. But Ludlowe admired again the beautiful poise of her body—not very tall, and slim, but so lithe, so sinuous, with such velvet-smooth grace of action; a body in perfect muscular harmony. Ludlowe decided that this poise must be the secret of her distinctive charm. Because it certainly was not beauty.

In a moment Gret had perceived him, and returned in full the measure of interest meted out to her. She, too, saw a creature of another world, and was quick to note, or rather to try and trace, the evident points of distinction and difference. Was it in the way his clothes had of hanging on him, or in the expression of the eyes that had seen and knew so much? Or—or what? He was quite different from the men round about her; that was plain even to her—one of the same kind as Bertie and Bobbie, only more so—more of a man.

Ludlowe passed on, and Gret, too, started on her way

again. She was glad of the advent of these people fresh from the big outside world. As a rule, life in the woods was like playing a game without any pieces on the board; and the new people promised new interests.

There was no sign of either Bobbie or Bertie about the mill as Gret entered. But she was hailed immediately by Ritchie, the sawyer.

"Hallo, Gret! Dick about the boom when you came down?"

"No; up on the grounds," replied Gret, coming to the man's side and watching the whirling saw with a sort of admiration; it was so powerful and resistless.

"How soon are you going back up?" demanded Ritchie then.

"Not yet a while. Why?" asked Gret.

"Oh, I just thought perhaps you were; that 's all. Yesterday I told Dick I did n't think we 'd be able to start on that J. C. Ban order this week, but I see we shall. I just thought perhaps it would save him booming those logs; that 's all. He could have rafted 'em right down. But it 's all right if you 're not going back up," concluded Ritchie amiably, knowing full well that Gret would run a mile to save the men half an hour's unnecessary work.

She looked exasperated now, and regarded him with a comical frown. "Bother!" she muttered, and then turned and walked out of the mill in her own abrupt way. The actual walk up to the felling grounds and back was nothing to her; but she had come down to the mill determined to see the other two of the new arrivals. However, she reflected philosophically that there would be plenty of opportunities in which to study them.

Gret reached the camp, and was about to pass right on through to the skid-road, when two things claimed her attention and called a temporary halt. One was the sight of the interesting man from the mill-house, seated on a

log, smoking, and apparently watching the camp proceedings with interest; and the other was the sight of Jake within the cook-house, violently gesticulating in order to attract her attention as she passed. Gret jumped off the road, and went toward the cook-house.

"Say!" began Jake, an apple in one hand, a peeling knife in the other, and a chunk of apple in his mouth. "That 's one of them people down at the mill-house, is n't it?" Gret nodded.

"Looks kind of lonesome, does n't he?" observed Jake.

Gret contemplated the distant figure a moment. She had not been struck herself with anything forlorn in his appearance. However, of course he might be feeling strange.

"Be kind of nice and neighborly to go up and tell him a few words, eh?" wondered Jake. "We could tell him to make himself at home, and walk around as much as he wants to."

Gret was undecided.

"I believe he 'd walk about if he wanted to," she said dubiously. "Still—he might like to have us say something friendly. There 's no telling with these kind of people."

Jake hastily called to Charlie, the second cook, to make up the fire in the cook-stove, opened a near-by drawer and pulled out a clean apron, donned it, adjusted his coat, patted his hair and started for the door. "Come on!" he called over his shoulder to Gret, and that young woman started obediently to follow.

Ludlowe was in a mildly contemplative mood this morning. He was enjoying a peaceful cigar and devoutly hoping that nothing would occur to disturb his enjoyment. But he eyed the couple advancing upon him, in single file and with business-like gait, with curiosity tinged with amusement.

Jake advanced and gave what he imagined to be a careless and unstudied nod of good fellowship. "Good morning!"

"Good morning, too," added Gret, ranging herself alongside, having suddenly reflected that to remain in the background would be to convey the impression that Jake was spokesman for the whole delegation.

"Good morning, three," said Ludlowe gravely.

Gret stared; so did Jake, while Ludlowe regarded both with grave composure. Then Gret, to whom a humorous situation never appealed in vain, longed to creep off somewhere and laugh to her heart's content; while Jake, in something of the same state of mind himself, curled the corner of his apron with great rapidity and then snorted right out, which was immediately Gret's undoing. She was taken with one of her uncontrollable fits of mirth, and very nearly cried with laughter. Ludlowe laughed softly too.

Then Jake essayed to straighten his face and apologize. "Say, this is a great way to act first show-off, stranger."

"It 's all right," said Ludlowe good-humoredly. "If this young lady," indicating the still shaking Gret, "ever recovers safely, there will be no harm done."

"Oh, she 'll come round all right," said Jake, casting an experienced eye on the girl. "She has those fits now and again. We thought we 'd come and tell you to walk around and make yourself quite at home."

"Thanks, I will," responded Ludlowe quietly, betraying by no sign the superfluity of the permission.

"And come in and have lunch with us, or dinner, whenever you feel like it," went on Jake affably. "That 's a good way to get acquainted."

"Thanks. Yes, it would be," agreed Ludlowe in bland, non-committal tones.

Not seeing how to prolong the interview to further advantage, and feeling that all had been done that could be justly required of his courtesy, Jake turned to go. And Gret, having overcome her mirth, and now feeling somewhat disgusted with herself, bethought herself of the mission to Dick and turned away also.

"Where are you going, Gret?" inquired Jake.

"Up to the grounds to see Dick for the mill," responded Gret.

Ludlowe rose from the log and threw away his cigar. "I should like to accompany you, if I may."

"Sure," assented Gret readily.

She walked back to the skid-road and sprang up on it, followed closely by Ludlowe. As she began to walk rapidly along the road, however, she was not followed quite so closely. The great logs that formed the sleepers of the road were connected by stringers of smaller timber, and along these Gret walked with the ease of long practice and the skill of a tight-rope walker. Ludlowe essayed to do likewise, seeing that it looked so easy, and only saved himself from an ignominious fall down between the sleepers by a long spring on to one of them. After that he varied his progress by more or less balancing and by a series of springs, keeping fairly well up with Gret, but finding that he was taking all the exercise he cared for. However, it was better than scrambling through the brush on either side the road. But he saw at once the secret of Gret's lithe, erect poise.

Gret went on up the road, unconcerned and apparently unobservant of the trials of her companion. She was by no means as oblivious as she seemed, however.

When they left the skid-road and began to climb the side of the mountain, Ludlowe attempted to open up a conversation. Evidently this girl did not intend to. She was the most laconic thing in the shape of a woman that

Ludlowe ever remembered to have met, although she did not appear at all shy.

"Who was the man that came up with you?" he inquired amiably.

"That was Jake, the cook," explained Gret. And then reflecting that possibly her companion was considering the validity of the invitation extended to him by that worthy, she turned her head coolly over her shoulder. Ludlowe was following close behind her in the narrow path by the side of the shute. "It's all right if he tells you to come to lunch or anything like that."

"Yes?" said Ludlowe in a tone of gentle interest, at the same time indulging in a quiet laugh behind his companion's back. He probably flattered himself that the tone was non-committal and ordinary, but Gret was keen to detect the over-smoothness and to suspect fun, and turning her head sharply encountered the laugh.

"Awfully funny country, is n't it?" she observed with a laugh of soft mockery. "Don't do things like that in San Francisco, do they?"

"Like what?" demanded Ludlowe, amused and interested.

But Gret only laughed slightly again, just a chuckle of fun and mockery as lively as his own; and Ludlowe felt that for once he was met on his own ground.

When they reached the felling grounds, Gret could see that Ludlowe was pleased and interested. She called up Dick and, after giving Ritchie's message, indicated the man by her side.

"This gentleman's one of Bobbie's friends from the mill-house. You show him round, Dick."

And with that Gret formally handed Ludlowe out of her keeping. After a few words to this man and that, she departed, much to Ludlowe's amusement, vanishing down the other side of the mountain.

She wanted to get back to the mill and see the remainder of the new specimens. Ludlowe was going to be very interesting; she could see that. At the same time she wanted to see the other man and the young woman, especially the young woman. A fashionable woman, a real swell from a big city, was a creature she had never seen or imagined.

She reached the mill at a lucky moment. Bobbie and Bertie were escorting round the three new arrivals, explaining to them the different processes. Oly was also standing within the building, being on his way down to Quellish and having been bidden stop in at the mill for probable orders for the *Transfer*. By the elaborate gravity of his countenance Gret knew that something highly edifying must be transpiring.

The group was in contemplation of Ritchie's saw, and that worthy looked studiously over their heads across at Gret.

"All right. They 'll be down some time this afternoon," she called to him, with a smile of bewildering brilliancy by way of expressing her approval of his policy of ignoring supercilious and entirely superficial interest.

Gret would have passed on up the mill herself, for she did not like the elder woman's expression, but Bobbie would not have that. He came quickly up to her, and taking her affectionately by the hand, drew her to meet his mother.

"Mother, this is Miss Margaret Silway. Gret, this is my mother."

Mrs. Baring signified her pleasure at the introduction by a bow of most punctilious proportions; while Gret, having in mind the formula usually heard in those parts on the consummation of an introduction, "Pleased to meet you," and disdaining to utter it, compromised matters by saying nothing and looking on with a smile that

might mean anything. Then Bobbie introduced Miss Vibart, whose bow was less elaborate, in better taste and more cordial. Again Gret smiled, but her eyes took in all particulars of the simple but faultless gown, the intricacies of a fashionable coiffure, the details of the pretty fancy linen collar and cuffs, tiny diamond brooch, dainty slippers and still daintier petticoats. And she noted the general air of well-groomed elegance, and knew in a moment just where she herself would stand among civilized women. These reflections took but a second of time, and then Bobbie was introducing Arthur Massinger. Arthur dispensed with the bowing ceremony, and put out his hand with a pleasant smile.

"We 've heard so much of you already, Miss Silway," he observed, with a glance at Bobbie, "that an introduction seems a mere formality."

Gret smiled, too, and held out her hand at once, and Arthur was surprised at the grip of those very brown, thin fingers.

Bobbie was pleased at this exhibition of cordiality on Arthur's part. He hoped his mother would also say something pleasant before the interview ended, but she did not. Instead, she started to walk forward with the air of one who has discharged an unpleasant duty and is glad of it. Bobbie was on thorns. He remarked Oly's presence, and knew that every stiff and unprepossessing detail of the whole affair would be rehearsed with disastrous faithfulness for the benefit of the assembled camp at dinner that night, and he knew what it meant to snub Gret. For once, too, he was disgusted with his mother's supercilious ways. Formerly she, like the king of old, could do no wrong, especially in matters of etiquette and correct procedure. Now it dawned on him that these things were a long way from being the sum total of life; and that one might be past mistress of etiquette and still

act in a very under-bred way. Bobbie felt that more real kindness and courtesy had been extended to him by these rough people in the time of his perplexity and trouble than he would meet with among his own people if he lived to be a hundred.

After his mother had left the building, Bobbie turned back, and in his well-intentioned but bungling way tried to apologize for his mother without appearing to do so.

"I hope you 'll get to know my folks well, Gret."

"Do you?" said Gret good-humoredly enough. She liked Bobbie, and he was not to be blamed if he had a peculiar kind of a mother.

"Of course, you know, mother does not understand the ways of this part of the country yet," went on Bobbie gently.

"She 'll learn," observed Gret grimly; and then, totally uninterested in the present subject, "Oly 's going down to the Harbor, and he 's going to tell the *Transfer* about the twenty bundles for Litherland."

"That 's a good idea," agreed Bobbie, a trifle absently. "If they take on much freight besides, I should n't think they could carry them." He turned away slowly. "Well, I must go and have my breakfast. Have you had yours, Gret?"

"Twice," replied Gret in a matter-of-fact way.

When Gret predicted that Mrs. Baring would speedily learn the ways of the locality, she had not really any intention of helping to teach the lesson. But that evening she sat on the edge of the bluff in front of their house with Eva a little while before going to bed. She told that soft-eyed maiden of the new arrivals from San Francisco, and all about the mysterious differences that appeared between them and the people among whom they dwelt, and was surprised to find that Eva, out of her stock of romances, could at once comprehend and classify

them. And then as she described for Eva's benefit the haughty and supercilious mannerisms of Bobbie's mother, it occurred to her to wonder how Anna, the previous autocrat of the mill household, got along with them. Immediately following came a desire to find out, and not deeming it advisable to interview Anna herself on the subject, Gret went in search of the enterprising Lizzie.

To Lizzie Gret gave a faithful representation of Mrs. Baring's peculiarities, and charged her with the task of visiting Anna upon the first favorable opportunity and testing the state of that lady's feelings. Lizzie was greatly interested, very curious and altogether delighted with the mission: and she made it her business to visit the mill-house the very next evening. Anna needed very little encouragement to pour forth the tale of her indignities and the slights to which she was daily subjected, and Lizzie bestowed unlimited sympathy. Indeed, so very sympathetic was she, and so horrified at such treatment of a hard-working and honest subject of a free country, that Anna's smouldering wrath was fed into a fierce flame. She was paid by the month, and only a few days' pay was, as it happened, due to her, and this small sum she decided to forfeit in the interest of a most dramatic and masterly coup. She hastily packed her grip and departed through the brush with the secretly edified Lizzie, remarking that it remained to be seen what kind of airs the obnoxious Mrs. Baring would indulge in when she cooked her own breakfast—or went without.

CHAPTER X

NEW PIECES ON THE BOARD

THE four new-comers at the mill-house were entirely different from anything Gret had ever come in contact with; yet, singular to say, she made very little mistake in adding them up and setting them down for very near their respective worth as individuals and as acquisitions to her life-circle. Mrs. Baring she mentally disposed of as a person of slight or no individual value, possessing a set of ideas not seemingly likely to accord with any one or anything; Maude, she decided, had plenty of common-sense and a certain reserve power, but very little personal charm or value. In her own mind Gret doubted whether either of the women could teach her anything she would care to learn; she certainly could not see anything that she cared to emulate in either, save, of course, the style and neatness of Maude's appearance; and as that was entirely out of the question, she never bothered about it. No, it was on the two men that Gret pinned her faith. Both, she saw, were well educated, and very refined. Beyond that she could hardly add them up with any degree of certainty. Massinger had something about him that she could not understand, and Ludlowe betrayed a subtle perfection of experience and wisdom that she could not begin to fathom; only that in judging the two men she felt that in Arthur Massinger's gentle, kindly temperament there could be no place for a keen, analytical mind such as Errol Ludlowe was possessed of.

She watched eagerly for an opportunity to get either of the men to herself and, not talk, but listen.

Arthur Massinger, as it happened, was the first to disclose himself and the hidden treasures of his mind. He was an ardent lover of nature, and notwithstanding his weak health roamed and climbed about untiringly. This, of course, was just such an opening as Gret needed. In the first place he recognized an invaluable guide, and she an invaluable opportunity. One afternoon started the friendship, which thereafter thrived exceedingly. Gret was rowing up the river, and noticed Massinger standing hesitatingly on one of the landings.

"Want to get across?" she called.

"No-o. I was just wondering where I could get a boat," explained Massinger. "I feel strongly inclined for a pull on the river."

"All right," said Gret, rowing toward him at once. "Jump in. You can have the oars."

Arthur obeyed. "Am I not keeping you from some errand?" he asked anxiously.

"No—oh, no!" laughed Gret. "I was n't going anywhere in particular. I 'm always going somewhere; that 's all."

She handed up the oars, and then sat with her head in her hands and watched while the young man sculled. She noted the beauty and finish of his style, the dainty feathering and the rhythm; but she knew at the same time that she could go five miles to his one. She waited until his breath began to shorten and a slight flush to appear on the worn, ascetic face, and then she coolly put out her hand.

"Stop now. I 'm going to row."

"Just a little way, then," allowed Arthur, yielding up his place.

Gret sat a moment, her hands on the oars, and looked

attentively at the sky. "It 's only about two o'clock, and it 's going to be fine all day," she said. "How would you like me to take you up to the Forks?"

"What is it—the Forks?" inquired Massinger.

"Where the river divides into two," explained Gret. "It 's fine—all between great tall bluffs. Don't suppose you ever saw anything like it."

"I should like to go immensely," said Arthur. "Is it far?"

"Oh, no; I go up often," responded Gret, who did not honestly think anything of a five-mile row.

They rowed on, and Massinger watched with delight the increasing beauties of the river, a fact which sent him up considerably in Gret's estimation. Presently he demanded to row again, but Gret would not hear of it.

"No; it tires you, and it does n't me. You 've had enough rowing for to-day."

"But, my dear girl!" remonstrated Arthur, surprised and amused at the abrupt way she settled things. "Do you suppose I 'm going to let you pull me for a mile or so up-stream? You 'd be worn out."

Gret laughed outright. "Why, I could row all day! You watch, now. If you see me looking tired, even the least little bit, you can have the oars."

And Arthur did watch, but not the faintest sign of weariness could he detect, neither the slightest increase of breath or color, nor the slightest break in the even, monotonous stroke that was neither slow nor quick.

At last the Forks was reached, Massinger being greatly overcome at the distance and the imposition he considered it to be on Gret. And the amount of breathless, reverent admiration he bestowed on the scene satisfied even that exacting young lady, who stood to it in the light of proprietor. The island, with its crown of giant pines, that

stood at the divide of the river, the great somber bluffs down which the sunlight slanted, and the vistas of dim, receding forests, all seemed to Massinger too beautiful for words.

"Let us land on the island for a few minutes, shall we?" he asked of Gret. And she complied by turning her boat immediately into the bank.

Sitting on one of the innumerable fallen trees near the water's edge, Arthur gave himself up to rapt contemplation of the beauty spread about him. Gret sat near, and covertly studied her companion. His admiration she could understand; the spectacle was grand and imposing, and he was viewing it for the first time. But there was an element in his admiration that she did not understand, and that—though, of course, she did not know it—was the reverence with which it was so deeply tinged. Arthur viewed nature as the loving work of a beneficent Creator, who adorned a house for him and his fellows; while to Gret nature and life and being were all so indissolubly mixed and related that she merely viewed and loved that of which she was a part. Of course, she never had knowingly thought the matter over at all; but the gracious sunshine and the blue skies that these forests and these growing things gloried in, she gloried in, too; and the radiance and delight that shone on the earth each morning burned in her, too, every morning that she arose. She could not understand feeling separate from it all, and it was just this reverent aloofness in Arthur's attitude that puzzled her.

By and by, having filled his soul, for the time being, with the beauty of it all, Arthur turned his attention to his companion. He felt drawn toward her, and was ready to take a great interest in the peculiar young life that carved its own way with such a bold, free hand. He questioned her in many ways as to her life and amuse-

ments, and Gret answered with a frank, unconcerned candor that made questioning easy. And then, ever feeling in others for what in his own life was the greatest joy and comfort possessed, Massinger sought by tactful ways to discover how great a share religion played in Gret's life. He naturally failed in the quest, seeing that there was nothing to discover. Then he went about the search in another way. He inquired into the lives, generally, of the community, and asked among other things how many denominations existed in that locality. Gret was entirely at a loss, and hastened to confess unqualified ignorance. Pursuing the matter, Arthur was concerned to find that Gret had never been inside a church in her life, and did not remember ever to have looked into a Bible. She knew there was such a book, and observed that there were one or two churches down in Quellish. She had an idea, however, that those were institutions principally for the Swedes. Arthur saw plainly that she knew very little of the subject and troubled less. He was surprised. It had always been a pet theory of his that in the peace and quiet of the country religion invariably found a home; in his own mind he had invested it with a simple and crude, it is true, but yet a very real piety. Of course, Gret might be but a single instance, but he doubted it. She was among the people too much to fail to absorb whatever was prevalent. Arthur had in mind the rural farming districts of the eastern states, and failed to allow for the vast difference between that and a western logging district.

Then in his gentle, kindly way Arthur questioned Gret as to her home and parents; and, accustomed as he was to hearing accounts of human lives, was not long in reaching a conclusion that, though erroneous in some respects, was near enough right for purposes of analysis.

Gret was conscious, as they rowed home, of a feeling

of having been weighed in the balance and found wanting. She could not exactly tell where the mental deficiency came in, but discerned enough to feel sure it would never be made good by any effort of hers. She had seen enough of Arthur, however, to want to see more; and so she proceeded to lay bait. She described Spirit Lake, the lake of the marvelous shadow, and related the Indian legend concerning it. Massinger was immediately interested, and wondered if it would be possible for him to find it on her description of the trail; whereupon he was informed that such an effort was not necessary, as she, Gret, stood ready to escort him thither any day he liked. Massinger was delighted.

"Will it take us a whole day, do you think?" he inquired.

"Well, it does n't me," said Gret thoughtfully.

"But you think it might take me that long," smiled Arthur. "I think in all probability it would. I don't believe I'm at all likely to climb as you could. Well, would we take provisions with us?"

"Oh, no. I'll fix that," answered Gret laconically.

"Oh! Well, then, all that is necessary is just to let you know over night."

"Need n't do that," replied Gret. "Just come and find me any morning you feel like going, and we'll start right away. You can almost always find me in the camp in the mornings."

With this agreement they parted, Gret having taken her companion as near to the mill as a landing would allow.

It was two or three days before Massinger started on the proposed expedition. He did not care, unless everything were propitious, to absent himself from his fellows a whole day. However, one bright morning, when Maude and Mrs. Baring were struggling in mutual disgust with

the intricacies of cooking and a new girl, and when Bobbie and Bertie were going down to Quellish to discuss with the mill-owners there the idea of a shingle combine, he decided that the absence for the day of himself and Ludlowe, who had requested permission to join in the undertaking, would be more of a blessing than a deprivation. So the two men donned old and easy shoes, and repaired to the camp to find Gret. She was not to be seen, and they went to the door of the cook-house for information. Jake was busy cutting meat, but he hastened to wash his hands and seat his visitors, at the same time cordially inviting them to partake of pie and coffee.

"Gret 's gone up on the grounds," he explained; "but the logs will be coming down in a few minutes, I guess, and she 'll be on them sure."

In about a quarter of an hour the shrill whistle of the donkey sounded, the cable started, and presently, wobbling and wriggling down the skid-road came the train of logs. On the most uneven monster of the lot, balancing for dear life and laughing aloud in her heart's glee, was Gret. Jake poked his head out of the door and shouted to her; and she, at the imminent risk of breaking her neck, as it seemed to the two men, turned her head and took in the situation at a glance.

"She saw you," said Jake contentedly. "She can't get off till they reach the slough and the engine stops, but she 'll be right back then."

And she was. In about two minutes after the engine stopped she came skimming up the skid-road, jumped off, and reached the cook-house like a whirlwind.

"We thought it would be a lovely day to go up to that lake," said Arthur, after cordially greeting her.

"It would—fine," agreed Gret in her business-like way, but with a pleasant smile, "We 'd better have some lunch before we start, then."

"Yes, you bet you had," agreed Jake, having immediate understanding of the lake in question.

"Oh, but really, we only had breakfast an hour ago," protested Massinger. Ludlowe looked on in unconcerned amusement.

"Yes? Still, it's a long climb, and it'll be quite a while before we get anything else to eat," said Gret. "We'd better eat. Jake, don't you want to make us some coffee?"

Jake did, bustling about in a most hospitable way. Presently there was set before the guests cold beef, cheese, pie, and steaming coffee; and certainly, after the reign of experimental cooking endured at home, these comparatively simple viands proved very tempting. Gret attended to herself, leaving Jake free to discharge thoroughly the duties of host. She went to a cupboard, the top shelf of which by dint of long fighting and long custom was sacred to herself—anything placed upon it being as good as in sanctuary, even if stolen in the first place from the very kitchen in which it stood—and took from it half a pie. This, together with a big mug of coffee, she placed before her upon the table, and then sat down and disposed of it with marvelous, yet silent celerity. Then in the same matter-of-fact way she took a pail, went to the spring and filled it, laved her hands and face, emptied the pail and brought it back to the kitchen, examined her broad-brimmed and untrimmed hat, placed it on her head best end foremost, and then sat down to await the readiness of her charges. And then for the first time she noticed the amusement in Ludlowe's eyes. She laughed, not altogether understanding the cause of his evident mirth, but unoffended in any case.

Added to what she had observed herself, Gret gathered from different remarks of Ludlowe's that Arthur Massinger's health was in a weak and failing state, and she eased off as far as possible the rigors of the climb to the lake.

Naturally tender-hearted to anything weaker than herself, she unconsciously showed the tired and worn young minister a deal of gentle consideration—a fact which was noticed without comment by both men. Altogether she was a very attentive and conscientious guide, going on first herself to see that all was well, and able to tell her companions the local if not the scientific name of every bird, beast and plant to be met with. Beyond the giving of liberal information on every subject asked, however, Gret said but little; and the two men, taking her to be naturally taciturn, chatted more particularly to one another, rejoicing in the unrestricted opportunity for conversation. Afterward they realized that every word they said had been both heard and considered, in face of which instructive occupation Gret had considered talking herself mere waste of time.

Before the lake was reached, Massinger was plainly very tired, but when at last he looked on the shining face of that great mirror of nature he forgot his weariness. And Ludlowe, too, less openly enthusiastic and more lazy in his enjoyment, yet still in his peculiar way a lover of nature and solitude, sat on one of the blue-gray rocks that bordered those singularly lucid waters and gazed about him with appreciative eyes. Gret sat close by, awaiting with patience what remarks might presently be forthcoming.

"Not a tree anywhere on its edge, you see, to ward off the reflection of those snow-peaks," mused Massinger presently. "I imagine this lake fills some volcanic crater. What do you think, Errol?"

"Yes, the surroundings do appear volcanic," agreed Ludlowe, his eyes resting in sleepy contemplation on the beauty before him. "I've not seen anything to equal this in the Swiss lakes."

Massinger shook his head, and returned to his reverent

survey of the lake. But Ludlowe presently transferred his attention for a few moments to Gret.

"Tired?"

Gret shook her head with a laugh. "No!"

"Been up here many a time, I suppose?"

"Yes, hundreds of times."

Ludlowe looked at the girl attentively. She was in repose mentally and physically, in a crouching attitude on the top of a boulder, her face turned toward the lake.

"What is your name an abbreviation of?" he inquired.

"Gret—Margaret?"

"Yes; that's one of my names," responded Gret. "But when I was young I used to call myself Gret, and the name has always stuck to me."

Ludlowe laughed. "When you were young? Well, what are you now, pray?"

"Eighteen," said Gret calmly.

"Oh, are you that much?"

"Yes," slightly surprised. "Did n't you think I was, then?"

"I could n't tell exactly. You're one of those persons whose age cannot be told to five years," explained Ludlowe. "And then your age and manners do not coincide."

Gret pondered the probable effect of an arrangement like this, and Ludlowe gazed about him again for a while. After a time he turned to Massinger.

"It is a barbarous confession in the face of so much soul-satisfying beauty, Arthur; but the fact remains that the base and earthly inner man of me is crying out loudly for sustenance."

"So is mine," confessed Arthur smiling. "This mountain air is so bracing. Miss Silway, we are hungry and athirst."

Gret jumped up on her boulder, and stretched herself into readiness for action. "All right. I'll take you

straight down to Murray's. But don't call me Miss Silway. Call me Gret. We don't have Miss This and Mr. That about here."

"Does no one get called by his surname?" inquired Ludlowe, rising and flicking odd particles off himself.

"Oh, yes. I never heard any one call my mother anything but Mrs. Silway," replied Gret.

"I see; and so until you attain to the dignity of marriage you'll be called Gret?"

Gret nodded and laughed, a laugh that the slight humor of Ludlowe's observation did not altogether account for.

Then she led the two men by a very precipitous, but very direct, route down to Murray's placer mining-camp, conducting them straight into the kitchen, where Mrs. Miner was in the midst of preparations for dinner.

"These two gentlemen are from the new mill down by us," she explained to that open-eyed individual. "Friends of the bosses. They came up from San Francisco a few weeks ago. I've been taking them up to see Spirit Lake. Can they have something to eat, Mrs. Miner?"

"Sure!" responded Mrs. Miner emphatically, hastily donning a clean apron and bustling about to find chairs.

The two men sat down with a distinct feeling of relief, while Gret helped Mrs. Miner prepare a small table in the corner of the kitchen. Upon this she presently placed a bountiful dish of ham and eggs, fried potatoes, coffee and the inevitable pie. Then while the three ate she stood about chatting, inquiring as to the strangers' impressions of the Northwest, the proposed length of their stay, the amount of kinship, if any, existing between them and the mill-bosses, the actual size and glory of San Francisco as compared with rumors, and other questions of like note. Finally Gret, having already established a sort of protectorate over Arthur, and noticing that he, out of the depths of his courtesy, was doing all the answering and

none of the eating, came to the rescue. She turned a critically elevated nose in the direction of the stove on the other side of the kitchen.

"What 's burning?"

Mrs. Miner fled at once, and during her anxious investigation Arthur was able to proceed with his meal in peace. He did not notice the true significance of the move on Gret's part, but Ludlowe did, and smiled. And Gret, looking up and catching the smile, felt a kinship of understanding established there and then.

On the way down home Gret talked more freely herself. The men were discussing the marvelous beauty of the lake they had just seen, and she told them of other natural marvels and beauties, known in many instances, according to her belief, only to herself. She told of a lake whose waters had unaccountably receded, and whose sloping shores of baked mud and shale were, during the summer, a wriggling mass of snakes; she described a natural and almost perfect monolith of granite that stood in one of the higher mountain passes, and spoke of huge bluffs that formed a circle whose center was a majestic amphitheater. And then she went on to talk of her own lakes, the shining fruits of her youthful researches.

"Your 'own' lakes?" queried Ludlowe, catching at the words.

"Yep," Gret nodded contentedly. "I found them, and nobody knows where they are but me. Oh, perhaps some of the Indians do. But I don't think so; nothing gets touched that I leave there. One of them—the best of them all—is so funny." She drew an elliptical form on the palm of her hand. "It is shaped just like an egg, and right out of the middle rises a pointed peak of rock, like the top of a mountain sticking out above the sea. And it 's ever so deep, too. One day I took up one of those big balls of twine—you know, about a hundred

yards in them—and tied a piece of rock on one end and dropped it over the side of the canoe. And when all the string had run out I had n't touched bottom."

"A hundred yards—three hundred feet! Yes, pretty deep for a lake," observed Ludlowe.

"But you don't know how much deeper it was," said Gret impressively. "It 's a very funny lake to look at, too. The trees dip in all the way round, so that it looks like a hole in the woods filled up with water. Quite the funniest lake I ever found."

The men smiled. "You spoke of a canoe," said Ludlowe. "Did you put one on this remarkable lake, then?"

Gret nodded. "Yes. Skookum—he 's gone now—made me a little canoe. One of those tarred canvas ones, you know. It 's up there now. I have n't been up to look at it for quite a while, though. I expect it 'll want another coat of tar by this." She laughed softly. "It was so funny. I took the canoe up and put it on my lake, and no one could think what I 'd done with it. Robin—don't know him, do you? But you will. Robin Start, of that Orchard place up above the boom—well, he never got over it. Wants to know even to-day what I did with the canoe."

"Well, are we to be favored with a glimpse of the Hidden One—the lake, I mean?" asked Ludlowe.

Gret looked thoughtful. "Oh, yes—some day when we 're up near there. It 's hard work to reach it; the brush is so thick."

"How on earth did you get the canoe up there, then?" demanded Ludlowe.

"Carried it," laconically. "Took me three days."

"Did n't your mother wonder what had become of you?" queried Massinger.

"Oh, I had to go home each evening, of course. That was the trouble," replied Gret, with a slight frown at the

mere recollection of her struggles. "I had to take it as far as I could, and then hide it. Then I 'd go up the next day and take it further. I got it up, though," she concluded triumphantly.

"You generally do manage to accomplish what you want, don't you?" queried Ludlowe amusedly.

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Gret with an air of caution.

"Well, then, perhaps you have the knack of only wanting what you believe you can accomplish?" pursued Ludlowe, merely curious to probe the girl's ability to grasp a distinction.

"Both," bluntly. "I 'm not fool enough to long for a star. But I always tell myself that if it is possible for any one on earth to do a thing—that is, if they were placed like me—it is for me."

Ludlowe laughed at such colossal assurance, and Massinger smiled.

"Well, there is no doubt," observed the latter in his gentle, thoughtful way, "that much more is possible to a confident nature than to one who makes a practice of sitting down and weighing the apparent possibilities of a situation."

"Most decidedly," agreed Ludlowe. "Many more things are possible, even in every-day life, than the bounds of possibilities are generally credited with including. In fact, it 's astonishing how few things are really impossible."

Gret pondered this statement a little as they descended into the camp, and considered it one of undeniable wisdom and truth. Arrived in the camp, she invited her companions to stay for supper. But the invitation was refused with thanks.

"Mrs. Baring will be expecting us," said Massinger. "And I imagine that under present conditions getting up

a dinner is an effort not to be despised." This last was more to Ludlowe than to Gret, but Gret heard and turned away toward the cook-house with a faint smile.

So with many thanks for a delightful day the two men went home to the mill-house, and Gret went in to supper in the camp.

During supper she was, of course, called upon to deliver her impressions of the two men whose escort she had lately been.

"Did they come the swell act on you like the woman did?" inquired Oly with a grin.

Several of the other men laughed, too, having had the memorable introduction scene most minutely and faithfully re-enacted for their delectation, and having been many times assured that in missing the sight of Gret's face on that occasion they had missed the sight of their lives.

"Oh, no; oh, no!" observed Jake knowingly from his vantage-point in the doorway. "They don't give you the glad hand and the glassy eye. If they did they would n't be back here in camp with a whole skin, you bet. There'd have been an accident somewheres. Trust Gret for that. Eh, Gret?"

Gret smiled amiably, but a trifle absently; and then during the rest of the meal she sat in thoughtful silence. The men did not remark this silence particularly; they were accustomed to having her take in the whole of a conversation in judicial silence, and then at the end of it deliver in few but pregnant words both her opinion of the subject discussed and those discussing it. But, as it happened, she really was paying very little attention to-night to what was going on about her. All that had been previously of unfailing and permanent interest to-night failed to divert. Gret was face to face with a new set of ideas, new vistas, new worlds to explore.

After supper she slipped quietly away and went home. It was rather earlier than her usual time for returning, and looking across from the camp-landing she saw that Eva was not yet on the bluff waiting for her arrival. It had become a habit of Eva's to sit on the bluff overlooking the river and wait for Gret to come home, when the two would sit chatting for an hour or more before going to bed. Eva looked forward to this chat, and Gret never allowed anything to cause her to be disappointed. There was great affection between the two girls; there always had been, and now they were yearly growing in companionship. Though as widely different as night from day, yet they were equals in intelligence. Eva was naturally a dreamer and a bookworm, her tastes sentimental and all her ideas romantic; and though in earlier years a sadly bewildered little student and a vague dreamer, yet in recent years her mind had cleared and her grasp and perception of subjects widened wonderfully. Moreover, as she got older she took to going to her mother with such as were puzzling or incomprehensible to her. And though at first inclined to slightly deprecate interruption, yet Mrs. Silway was struck with the precocious nature of the girl's questions and the wide range of her subjects, and gradually began to take an interest in the awakening of her mind. She took to passing her books on to Eva, with remarks and explanations where advisable, and Eva in return afterward discussed the work with her mother. And by and by, into the older woman's poor, frozen heart, with its unnatural peace and calmness, there crept the sweet warmth of companionship.

But this entente between mother and daughter did not interfere at all with Eva's love for Gret nor the eager delight she took in her companionship. She made it a practice after having read a particularly interesting or stirring book to lay a résumé of it before Gret, or if a

new or startling scientific theory to present it for Gret's inspection. And Gret, who was far too restless and busy to read a book through for herself, liked well enough to listen in the evenings to an account of what Eva had been reading during the day. She would pass judgment on the heroine, or the plausibility of theory, in her usual unhesitating, downright way. It was rarely in the case of fiction that Gret knew the author, and she never cared particularly to know. She always treated the subject with more or less condescension, as being merely the product of another's imagination. Still, she was often carried by Eva's enthusiasm into discussing various fictitious characters with much ardor. Very various and quaint were the discussions held by these two lonely girls, ranging all the way from the atomic theory of creation to Ibsen's heroines. And in all Gret's intensely practical, blunt mind counterbalanced Eva's dreamy, poetic, and highly fanciful tendencies, while partaking slightly now and again of the younger girl's fine enthusiasm. Thus each worked the other's weal.

Eva was sitting on the porch with her mother, reading, and as Gret appeared over the edge of the bluff she put her book down in the chair and came running to meet her. Together the two went round to the back of the house to find Jack, and procure for him the piece of cake which was his usual and highly prized supper.

"You did n't come home to lunch, Grettie," observed Eva.

"No," responded Gret. "I took those two new men from the mill-house up to see Spirit Lake. I'm going to tell you all the funny things they said soon."

The two girls came back to the bluff with the piece of cake divided equally between them and Jack hopping contentedly after them. Gret placed herself on the ground, her sinuous body lying passive on the mossy sward, and

Eva seated herself on her feet—a favorite position of hers, which allowed of her rocking her body gently to and fro. Here, while they alternately fed and teased Jack with the cake, Gret related the experiences of the day, detailing most of the conversation that had taken place between the two men.

"They must lead lives a great deal like some of those people in your books," she remarked, regarding Eva with unwavering eyes. "They talked of receptions and crushes and balls and things. And they spoke of a woman—I guess she must have been a swell, too—who did just as she liked, and about a girl who had to marry a horrid man ever so much older than herself. At least, they said they expected her mother would make her do that."

"I told you!" said Eva triumphantly. "You said books were n't natural. Mother said people led lives exactly like many of those in the books."

"*We* don't," observed Gret with charming egotism.

"No; but mother says that 's just because we are n't civilized."

"Why are n't we, then?" demanded Gret.

"Oh, because father keeps us here and won't let us be," explained Eva in an unconcerned, matter-of-fact way.

"Humph! If I were mother I 'd see about it," commented Gret ominously.

"Oh, well!" said Eva thoughtfully. "It 's awfully nice and quiet here. And I believe mother would just hate to be with father all the time. And I know I should."

Gret nodded, her mind roving quickly to other things. "Say Evie, I do wish you could see these new people. They 're so different to all these about here. You should just see the young lady—her clothes are lovely. She looks quite a different shape, even, to us. Come down to the mill with me, and I 'll show them all to you."

"Oh, no, Grettie, I could n't!" said Eva shrinkingly.

Gret stared, her sister's shyness being an undiminishing source of amazement to her. "Why not?" she demanded.

"Oh-h," hesitatingly. "I don't like to come out all down there. I would like to see them, but— And then I would n't know what to say to them."

"Say the same as the people in books," advised Gret. "You ought to know all about that." Then she grinned roguishly, having in mind her own introduction ceremony. "Say nothing. Just look at them." Then, indignantly: "I never saw such a girl in all my life! I believe you think that if you were to come out of this old house you 'd get eaten up right away, or else somebody would look at you and you 'd melt."

"Oh, no; I don't think that," contradicted Eva in a gentle, deprecating way.

"Yes, you do. Won't go near the camp because the boys look at you. Of course, they look at you." And Gret laughed wickedly. "Why not? Suppose they 're going to keep their eyes on the sky while you pass by? If I were as pretty as you I 'd want them to look at me."

Eva blushed, and rocked herself to and fro on her toes. She had all a student's self-consciousness and shyness; and as there had been no one to insist on her overcoming it, nothing to push her forward into the light of day, it had grown almost abnormal. It was a state of mind perfectly incomprehensible to Gret, who had never in her life wasted a second thought as to whether others watched her or what they thought if they did.

"Well," observed Gret presently, "I 'm going to go to San Francisco and get civilized myself one of these days."

"Oh, you don't have to go to San Francisco to do it," said Eva quickly. "Anywhere—any big town will do. Why, in Portland, where father is so much, they 're quite civilized. I saw a lot of pictures in the Pacific Magazine that father left here—big hotels, with palm-trees in front,

and street-cars and big ships, and carriages, and stores so big that you could get Dimsdale's into one of the windows."

"Yes, but I don't know any one in Portland," remarked Gret, quite ignoring the fact that her father lived there.

"But you don't know any one in San Francisco, either," objected Eva.

"But I shall when these people get back," explained Gret.

"But—I don't see how that helps things," said Eva, puzzled. "How does it, Gret?"

"Don't know yet," replied Gret with a little frown. "I've got to think about it."

And that ended the conversation on this particular subject for the time being. But though for a couple of hours or more Gret discussed other and widely different things, yet when at last she went to bed the thoughts that had been only laid aside came trooping back. The expeditions to Quellish, the glories of Dimsdale's store, and the affairs of the camp—all those things that had filled her life with interest became suddenly childish and insufficient. There comes a time when the interests that have held youth fall silently away, and the individual stands face to face with the half-wild, half-stern, but wholly sweet ambitions of womanhood or manhood.

Gret stood on the edge of this change, and to-night her mind was a chaos. Soon it would calm down, and she would grasp the new order of things. And then she would plan.

CHAPTER XI

A BENEVOLENT CONSPIRACY

IT is safe to say that no character, man or woman, ever astonished Gret Silway quite as much as did Arthur Massinger. In the first place it was only her curiosity that was aroused, and that she was determined to satisfy. She was quick to detect the mysterious something behind that gentle personality, some hidden delight, some ever-present sweet reflection, which gave the mild yet fever-bright eyes that unfailing look of peace and love. But what this mysterious something was, casual observation would not disclose. A systematic study was necessary.

One thing Gret did soon discover, however, as a result of close observation. And that was that Massinger suffered physically, though he said nothing of it. In this matter she felt free to go to Ludlowe for information, having already set that unconscious gentleman up in her own mind as the highest authority obtainable on most matters, the Gamaliel at whose feet she would sit.

"Is n't Mr. Massinger sick?" she asked abruptly, having sought Ludlowe high and low and finally finding him seated on the camp-landing, lazily watching the drift-wood floating down with the tide.

He looked up at her with a smile. The girl's abrupt, uncompromising ways amused him a dozen times a day. "Yes, he is, and a very sick one, too, sometimes," he said. "But he can't or won't believe it."

"What 's the matter with him?" inquired Gret.

"Consumption."

"And does n't he know it?" marveled Gret.

"Oh, yes; he knows it, I suppose. But consumptives rarely think they are as bad as they are," explained Ludlowe. "I fancy Arthur thinks it 's only a case of being over-tired and over-worked, and that he can remedy matters at any time he chooses."

"Can't he be cured?"

"Oh, yes, I think he might be, if he would take care of himself," frowning as the many-wasted arguments in this line occurred to him. "But he won't."

"What 's good for him?" demanded Gret.

"Plenty of fresh air and rest and nourishing food. That 's all I know of," replied Ludlowe. "The mill-house, in that hollow down by the river, is not the best place in the world for him, I imagine. I 'm glad to see you take him out into the woods and higher places. Entice him out as much as you can, Gretchen; only don't overtax his strength."

Gret accepted the charge in a grave, matter-of-fact way. "I will. Is that all?"

"Well, I don't think there 's anything else you can do," said Ludlowe, smiling again. "No one can really do very much with him. He barely eats enough to keep a sparrow alive. A consumptive's appetite is a most capricious thing."

Gret nodded thoughtfully. "And I don't suppose the cooking 's any too good down at your place now Anna 's gone."

"It 's not easy to prepare delicacies in a locality like this," returned Ludlowe evasively. "Besides, Arthur would be indignant if anything were prepared especially for him. He does n't own to being an invalid, you see."

Gret sat down on the landing and buried her face in her hands. Apparently she thought very deeply on some subject or other for a few minutes, after which she jumped up and, having seemingly forgotten Ludlowe's

presence, went up the board-walk into the camp. She entered the cook-house and sat down with a thoughtful air; and Jake, noticing the meditative expression and observing that it was also an amiable one, brought his chopping-bowl over and sat near her.

"Ever know any one that had consumption, Jake?" inquired Gret, opening the campaign without any prelude as usual.

"Lots," responded Jake complacently. "Dozens of 'em in the hotel in Arizona where I worked once."

"And what did they have to eat?" demanded Gret.

"Oh, oysters and beef broth and chicken and eggs and cream beaten up with wine, and—oh, most anything that 's good," replied Jake. "What do you want to know for, Gret?"

"You know Arthur Massinger, don't you?" said Gret. "The tall one—wears the light suit." Jake nodded. "Well, would you think he had consumption?"

"Yes, looks like he might have," responded Jake with an air of wisdom.

"He has. You 're not to tell any one," with a frown to emphasize her words.

"Course not! What do you take me for?"

Gret did not specify, but a faint smile rounded the corners of her mouth. "Well, say, Jake, the cooking must be awful down at the mill-house for a man that 's sick and can hardly eat anything, must n't it?"

"You bet; awful tough proposition," agreed Jake. "That was a bad stroke of business—losing Anna Shogren."

Gret nodded agreement. "Say, Jake, could n't we manage to fix up something nice now and again for that young man to eat? Only, of course, we would n't have to let him know why we did it. I think he 's very nice and good."

"Yes, he is that," agreed Jake readily. "Came in here and sat down and talked about an hour the other day, just as nice as anything; no preaching, either. Nothing stuck up about him—not so much as the other one."

"Oh, the other one is n't stuck up really," said Gret quickly. "It 's just his manner."

"Perhaps so," allowed Jake, chopping thoughtfully. "Well, of course, I can make beef broth for the young fellow, and I guess I can manage chicken now and again. Robin 's got a fine showing, more 'n necessary," with a grin. "He 's getting too much pocket-money anyhow lately—taking on airs. See that new tie of his?"

"See it!" Gret laughed. "Saw it as soon as it turned the bend of the river."

"Told me he was saving up, too," went on Jake.

"Pooh! Fancy Robin saving," scoffed Gret.

"Oh, I guess he is all right," said Jake impressively. "It 's all off with his going to Portland if he does n't."

"Going to Portland," echoed Gret.

"Why, yes." Jake looked surprised. "Did n't he ever tell you? Yes, he says he 's tired of working on the farm and taking his uncle's jaw. He 's going to Portland to be a store-clerk or something like that."

"Humph! May not be so easy as he thinks," observed Gret. "Say, Jake, I believe that egg and cream and wine affair is one of the best things for a sick man; don't you?"

"Ought to be," agreed Jake.

"Well, we 've got eggs and cream up here, if I get the wine," went on Gret.

"Sure."

"All right. I 'll get the wine," with a confident nod of the head. "What kind shall I get?"

"Dago red," responded Jake promptly.

Gret looked a trifle dubious. "Well! All right, then,"

jumping up. She stood in the doorway a moment or so, debating; then she went up the skid in search of Oly.

"Going down to Quellish to-night?" she inquired of that bronzed and amiable personage. Oly had lately joined the gang of roystering spirits which went down from the camp every Saturday night.

Oly nodded with a smile of gleeful anticipation. "Why? What do you want, Gret?"

"Want you to go into Hoffman's sample-room and get me a bottle of wine," explained Gret gravely.

"Eh?" in open-eyed amazement.

"Did n't you hear what I said?"

"Oh, yes—only—all right, Gret. What do you want it for?"

"To drink, of course," dryly. "What did you suppose? Here 's the money," proffering a dollar.

Oly pocketed it, laughing, but understanding that no more questions were to be asked. "What kind of wine, Gret?"

"Dago red," gravely.

Oly roared.

"Why? Is n't it a wine?" demanded Gret sharply.

"Yes, course," still laughing.

"What other name has it got?" inquired Gret keenly.

"Why, it 's mostly called port wine."

"Oh!" Gret looked thoughtful for a moment, but reserved her remarks for Jake. "Well, get it whatever it is. Take it to Jake and tell him to put it away for me," turning to go back down the road.

"All right—if the boys don't find it and drink it up," said Oly facetiously.

Gret paused on her downward way. "It 'll be there on Sunday morning," she observed finally.

Oly grinned.

It amused Ludlowe—and other observers, too, more or less—to see the solemn, matter-of-fact way in which Gret took possession of Arthur Massinger. With that complete disregard of all extraneous considerations of others and the opinions of others, which is at once the chief power and the chief characteristic of a strong will, Gret pursued her course all unconscious of criticism or notice. She had made up her mind to do two things: to cure Arthur Massinger if fresh air and good food would do it, and to discover the secret of that unvarying calm and sweetness. She took him up to the felling grounds, and together they would sit and watch the great trees fall, clutching the air with giant arms in a last, despairing grasp. She took him up to her lakes, and together they retarred the hidden canoe; she took him down to Quellish and over the sweet-smelling timber mills—in fact, she managed to have him with her wherever she went. But in all these expeditions she husbanded the man's failing strength as a mother might that of an ailing child; if it was a matter of rowing, she did it all; if the climb was stiff, she had numberless excuses for rests and a rest invariably meant the beginning of a conversation or discussion which would last at least half an hour. And she never started anywhere, on any sort of an expedition, without first of all being stricken with hunger which nothing but a visit to Jake could appease. And in the kitchen, while she ate heartily—which was a feat that presented no difficulty at any hour of the day—Jake would be taken with a sudden hospitable notion and prepare a glass of cream beaten to a froth and diluted with wine, or bring forth a bowl of delicately clear beef broth, or a plate of chicken and biscuits. And so sad, crest-fallen, and altogether upset was he if Arthur would not accept these delicacies that that kindly soul would eat anything at any time rather than inflict the pain of a refusal.

Many a consultation and rehearsal did the conspirators have in order that the performance might be varied sufficiently to escape the danger of premeditated appearance; and many a time did Gret sit down and indulge in one of her fits of laughter over their duplicity and Arthur's innocence. And Ludlowe, too, frequently accompanying the two about, perceived the manœuvering and was secretly amused and not a little touched.

Being thus constantly in Massinger's company, it was not long, of course, before Gret discovered the leading influence in the young minister's life. For—whether rightly or wrongly is for theologians and scientists to discuss—Arthur believed in a personal Christ, whose Presence was with him every moment of his life. Not less real than the girl Gret in flesh and blood beside him was this Divine, Invisible Presence, and to Arthur the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother" was no myth of an apostle's imagination. Gret heard all this in so many words from his own lips, otherwise she would never have credited her senses. Arthur spoke very little of his religion as a rule; but Gret had none, and he hoped to win her over to the service in which he delighted. From the first he had leaned toward the girl, whose fearless, independent nature, magnetic by reason of its very strength, had drawn him as no other woman nature ever had done, and, zealous disciple first and man afterward, he coveted her for the Master he loved.

For a while Gret regarded Arthur with wonder not untinged with amusement and a little secret scorn. How a man of so much learning and of such intellect—a fellow, in fact of the same college as Ludlowe—could harbor such an hallucination passed her understanding. That he did, wholly and unreservedly, and that it was second nature with him, she could not long doubt. And presently she reconciled herself to him as a beautiful character and

a scholarly, manly man, with just this one peculiar twist in his intellect. She was too kindly natured to show her amusement and utter incredulity in the matter, for she saw how dear the subject was to the man's heart. And so to his dying day Arthur never knew how utterly and pathetically futile were his endeavors and his hopes—confident to the end—to win to the cross of Christ the pagan soul of Gret.

The difference in opinions between Arthur and Errol Ludlowe was of course as wide as the poles, and this Gret soon realized. They were frequently together with her, and nothing in their conversation ever escaped her. As a rule they avoided arguing on matters of creed and belief; their friendship was too deep and their realization of the futility too great. Still, now and again they touched swords lightly on such matters.

"How can you look on all this and not be thankful, you pagan?" demanded Arthur one evening, with faint, good-humored regret.

Gret was rowing them home from Quellish. It was evening, just a little past sunset, and they rowed up a river like an endless ribbon of opal light set in banks of green filigree; pointed daggers of light thrust through the towering walls of pines, and the air was full of incense and the night call of birds.

"I am thankful," responded Ludlowe serenely.

"What for?" inquired Arthur dubiously.

"That I happen to suit my environments, and so am here," explained the pagan.

"Why should n't you suit them when they were made for you?" smiling.

"Well, you see," said Ludlowe, who was in the mood to tease even his best friend, "you take it that your environments were made specially for you and that therefore they are bound to suit, while I take it that I am a

product of those same environments which are likewise bound to suit. Either way works satisfactorily in this case."

"How can you avoid believing they were made for you if you believe in creation at all?" asked Arthur gravely.

"I don't—as you do," coolly. "Organic and chemical laws acting on primordial nebulae appeals more strongly to my reason than a Creator evolving planets by a thought out of chaos."

"Ah, you 're a hopeless case," said Arthur smiling, but still with that faint shade of regret.

Ludlowe regarded him with a sort of affectionate amusement for a moment or so, and then glanced away. Facing them both sat Gret, rowing. Her wide eyes were on Ludlowe's face; the sunset-light streamed straight into them, and to Ludlowe they looked afire.

Once in a lifetime there comes to the eyes of men and women this lightning flash of delight. For the merest part of a second, quenched instantly by conventionality and reserve and rarely noticed, it yet comes—this lightning acclaim of the heart and senses. Happy the soul that once in a cycle of time reaches out and touches its mate.

CHAPTER XII

A FRIEND IN NEED

“GRET, come here and let us look at you. What have you been doing with yourself all this frightful day?”

From the mill threshold, over which she was about to cross, Gret looked across to the mill-house lawn, or that more or less uneven slope of bank which lay directly in front of the house and did duty in that capacity. Upon it in various attitudes of prostration lay Ludlowe, Massinger, and Fonseker; near-by, in a folding chair, Maude reclined. Gret strolled across and joined them.

“Just look at her,” went on Ludlowe in injured tones. “Cool as a cucumber. Gret, nothing but a savage could be cool on a day like this.”

“No?” Gret smiled unconcernedly. Then she looked down on the recumbent figure of the man, the smile dying away. From Ludlowe her glance wandered off down the river, and then back to the lawn. She looked Massinger over critically, and then glanced across at Maude. Maude smiled sweetly. She liked Gret about as well as she liked any woman. There was nothing dangerous to present interests about her, and then Maude was secretly delighted at the way in which, from the day of the introduction until the present, Gret had methodically ignored Mrs. Baring’s existence. Many a time after that memorable incident, when household troubles began to thicken about her and she had nowhere to turn for advice and help, Mrs. Baring would have been glad to call on and consult the once despised camp-girl. And then as she

came to live in the place and to see local things and people in something like their true local perspective, she recognized, in part at all events, her mistake—mistake, that is, from the point of present advisability and comfort. She recognized too, as she was bound to do, the girl's dominant character and the practical, resourceful mind; but with recognition her interest had to cease. She could not avail herself of any of these same useful qualities. Gret had never crossed the threshold of the mill-house since she herself had entered it, and in face of the indifference of Gret's serene manner even Mrs. Baring's hauteur was abashed. If Gret had been playing a part, or merely retaliating, it is doubtful whether she could have been so eminently successful. But she was not. Her indifference was as real and unfeigned as it was complete.

Mrs. Baring made many overtures, and tried in several inconspicuous ways to make amends for early errors, but to no purpose. She could not succeed for the simple reason that she was entirely without the range of Gret's consideration. And of these manœuvres and these failures Maude was fully cognizant, being in secret much edified. She invited Gret to be seated now with as much cordiality as she ever displayed to any one. But Gret shook her head.

"I 'm not going to stay, thank you. I just came down to the mill to see if an order was out." She turned her head in Fonseker's direction. "I don't think it is, is it—that Hart and Kern?"

"Was n't at noon," replied Bertie, gazing at Gret sideways from out the shelter of a straw hat laid flat on his face.

"Dick thought if the *Transfer* was coming up for that it could bring us up some supplies instead of sending for them," said Gret thoughtfully. "I was going down to have them put on board."

"Yes?" murmured Bertie with polite interest.

"Well, there 's no hurry for that. Sit down, Gret," commanded Ludlowe. "Arthur and I had an argument this morning, and as you are about the only person who can properly settle it, we postponed it until your arrival. He said—"

At this juncture Bobbie appeared in the doorway of the mill-house. Through the open window of her sitting-room Mrs. Baring had noticed Gret. Being at present engaged in a gloomy discussion of the ever-present hired-girl difficulty, she had been struck with an idea.

"I wonder whether Gret could help us at all."

"Could if she would, I dare say," responded Bobbie, who was actively engaged in collecting together the paraphernalia necessary to the establishment of himself in comfort on the lawn.

"Well, I don't see why she should n't," observed Mrs. Baring plaintively.

"And I 'm afraid she does n't see why she should, either," commented Bobbie.

"Well,—" Mrs. Baring looked entirely unconvinced. She reflected for a few minutes, and then, just as Bobbie was about to depart with his collection of necessities, looked up. "Well, tell her—Gret—that I want to see her."

Bobbie paused in his career and called across the lawn, cutting short Ludlowe's sentence, "Gret, mother wants to see you!" Then, in response to remonstrance from within, "What? Oh, it does n't matter. Gret does n't mind my shouting."

Gret smiled. "Well, I 'm not going to run away."

"I know; but mother wants you to come into the house," explained Bobbie.

Gret shook her head calmly: "I 've got to hurry back to the camp."

Bobbie lugged his load of creature comforts back over the threshold. "I told you so. She won't come."

Mrs. Baring looked resigned, but like most persons of haughty tendencies she was able, when her comfort or convenience became involved, to stoop with equal and sometimes amazing facility. "Take a chair out for me, then, Bobbie. I must come out myself."

Bobbie seized another deck-chair, and dragging it across the lawn deposited it near Gret. "Don't you move, madam. Mother's coming out to talk to you."

Gret looked with a slight smile from Bobbie to the chair, and then at the stately figure sailing toward her over the sward. She varied not a muscle from her easy standing attitude, but watched Mrs. Baring thoughtfully as she gracefully intrusted herself to the yielding mercies of the deck-chair. Being comfortably ensconced, Mrs. Baring looked up at the girl before her, the faint, puzzled look of interest coming into her eyes that the sight of Gret now quite frequently awakened. She could not understand the girl's self-possession and poise, it being a pet theory of hers that these were the positive hall-marks of long and consistent good birth and breeding, obtainable in that and no other way.

And Gret stood and looked thoughtfully at Mrs. Baring, not because she found anything puzzling or even interesting in that lady, but because she was wondering whether—in view of certain nebulous ideas and plans already floating in her brain—she would ever need to make use of her.

"Gret," began Mrs. Baring plaintively, "does your mother have much trouble with her servants?"

"No." Gret shook her head. "Oh, no! Lizzie's been with us ever since I was a little girl."

"How fortunate!" murmured Mrs. Baring enviously. "I have had so much trouble with mine. Really sometimes I get so much discouraged that I feel I must give up and go home sooner than I intended."

This was a result Gret had not considered and did not desire. She frowned thoughtfully. "What is the matter with all the girls?" she inquired.

"Why, they 're ignorant—absolutely ignorant," answered Mrs. Baring, with emphasis almost amounting to excitement. "And if you attempt to teach them they get insulted and leave!"

Gret drew a mental outline of Mrs. Baring's probable attempts at teaching and smiled. She said nothing, however, and Mrs. Baring went on tentatively.

"Do you happen to know of a good girl, Gret? You seem to know every one about here."

Gret shook her head. "I don't know anybody better than Anna Shogren was, and you did n't like her."

"She did n't wait to see whether I did or not," said Mrs. Baring petulantly.

"Well, she thought you did n't anyway," smiling slightly. "You know, out here hired girls are just as good as those that hire them. Any one that thinks differently has got to do her own work. They don't think that way down in San Francisco, do they?"

"They 're a perfectly different class, of course," said Mrs. Baring with an unconscious return to hauteur.

"Yes? Well, they 're not here. It 's considered all right to work for one's living," explained Gret coolly. She was not at all interested in having Mrs. Baring come to a right way of thinking; but she felt that the sentiments propounded would be distasteful to that lady and insisted on them accordingly.

"Oh, well, it 's not necessary for us to discuss the backwoods view of the servant question as against the city view," said Mrs. Baring with cold resignation. "The question is, how am I to get a decent girl? I must get one somehow. I feel sure Linda means to go this evening. I notice all her things are gone from round the

kitchen. They never say anything until they are ready to walk out."

Gret laughed amusedly. Then she reflected for a second or so, looking thoughtfully at Mrs. Baring from time to time.

"Well, if Anna could be got back," went on Gret, with emphasis on the "if," "could you keep her, do you think?"

"Oh, dear me, I should never go near her," declared Mrs. Baring dramatically.

"Well, I 'll tell you what I 'd do if I were in your place," said Gret thoughtfully. "When I wanted anything done, or altered, or anything like that, I 'd let Bobbie or Bertie do it. They always got along with her all right. She never seemed to get mad at anything they said to her, and yet they were always teaching her something."

"Oh, yes. We managed the Unalterable beautifully, did n't we, Bert?"

"You did," said Bertie gently.

"Bobbie is of a happily democratic and cosmopolitan nature," remarked Ludlowe, who was lying taking in everything in indolent amusement.

"But how could we get Anna back?" asked Mrs. Baring, intent on the main question.

"I 'll see," replied Gret shortly.

"Oh, do you know where she is, then?" inquired Mrs. Baring instantly.

The auditors on the lawn, knowing of Mrs. Baring's suspicions as to Gret's share in Anna's sudden departure, suppressed smiles—an effort which was not lost on Gret. She looked into Mrs. Baring's eyes with unwavering gaze. "I know where her home is, of course."

"Oh!" Mrs. Baring's sharpness subsided. "Well, will you—"

"Yes, I 'll see," replied Gret with a nod of the head. Then she turned hastily on her heel, suddenly remember-

ing her original errand. "Goodness, I must hurry back! Dick won't know what has happened to me." And with a smiling glance round the prostrate group on the lawn she walked off.

"Well, I wonder when she 'll see," grumbled Mrs. Baring. "She 's such a funny creature—never says what she intends to do."

"No, but she does it," grinned Bobbie.

"Yes. I consider Gret the most pronounced character in the way of a woman that I ever met," observed Ludlowe. "Placed in other circumstances she 'd have been a Cleopatra or a Catherine."

"Oh, no, not that, Errol," demurred Massinger. "Gret is quite womanly, and her heart is in the right place."

Ludlowe lay near Massinger, and he turned his head and glanced quizzically at his friend. "I hope it is, Arthur," he said, "wherever that may be."

Gret stayed in the mill for a few minutes, and then went back to the camp. About half an hour later the mill-house company beheld her rowing down-stream in her deliberate, automatic way. Three or four heads were raised off cushions and camp-chairs.

"Where are you going, Gret?"

"Quellish," came the laconic answer.

"Bet you what you like she 's going to find Anna," prophesied Bobbie.

"Bobbie, don't get into the habit of saying that word 'bet' so frequently," entreated his mother. "Every other sentence lately contains it. If you ever go back home you 'll have the greatest difficulty in eliminating from your speech these slang words and phrases."

"Won't want to," responded Bobbie promptly. "Sas-siety will think it 's awfully cute. At least, if I can't be rich I can be famous."

Bobby's prophecy was very correct.

It was not very long before Gret's boat, with Anna sitting stolidly upright in the stern, rounded the bend of the stream and came in sight of the mill-house. A ripple of laughter went round the lawn.

"I told you so," said Bobbie. "There 's Anna, sure enough." And Bobbie went off into a series of chuckles, and rolled on the grass in ecstasy.

"What an extraordinary girl!" gasped Mrs. Baring.

"Just think of all she 's done while we 've been lounging here on this lawn without stirring," said Bertie in accents of awe. "It makes one warm to think of it."

"I 'm afraid she 'll grow old very young," commented Maude with a little laugh.

"I don't know, now," said Ludlowe, surveying the approaching boat with interest. "Do you think any one with an energy like hers ever does grow old?"

Gret ran the boat hard into the bank, and held it alongside by the aid of a willow branch. Bobbie and Massinger both hurried down to help Anna and her telescope bag, which she seemed to consider by far the most precious part of the load, out of the boat.

"Glad to see you back, old lady," said Bobbie with genuine cordiality.

"Hallo, Anna!" smiled Bertie sweetly.

The rest of the company smiled amiably, and among them was Mrs. Baring herself, though she found nothing to say. And Anna went on her way up the lawn with the telescope and a wide smile. As she passed on Mrs. Baring rose and hurried after.

Gret, from her position in the boat, glanced from one to another of the little group. Then her eyes fell on Massinger, who was coming toward her down the lawn, and she smiled. Massinger seated himself as near the edge of the boat as safety permitted.

"Where have you been all day?" he asked.

"Why, I went up to see our new timber tract with Dick," explained Gret. "I did n't quite know how far it was or how hard to get to, so I thought I 'd better not take you."

"It has seemed so strange not to see you all day," went on Massinger, his gentle, kindly eyes resting on the girl's face with almost unconscious affection. And in truth it had seemed strange. He had gone up to the camp looking for her, and it seemed to him the camp was positively deserted when that laconic, dominant personality was absent. He had made several plans for the disposal of his time, and then had felt too tired to carry any of them out. And yet he never did feel tired in the face of anything Gret proposed to do. It seemed as if her energy were enough for both and bore him along on its never-failing tide.

"Well, it was awfully hot to-day," said Gret in a matter-of-fact way. "I guess you were better off down here."

"Well, I did n't like being better off," responded Arthur with a laugh.

Gret smiled, too, and indicated by a tap of her foot the bright new pails in the bottom of the boat. "Well, to-morrow—"

"What are those for, Gret?" shouted the ever-inquisitive Bobbie, his attention attracted by the movement.

"To go blackberrying with," replied Gret.

Bobbie sat up from out the depths of his cushions. "Well, say, let 's all go up and have a picnic, eh?"

"Yes, that 's a good idea," commended Maude; "and get Jake to put up the lunch. Just at present our larder is sadly depleted."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Gret, placing her oars in the rowlocks and preparing to push off. "Well, then, you 'll all be in camp to-morrow morning by eight o'clock?"

"Eight o'clock?" in chorus.

"Why, yes. The earlier we start the cooler it will be to climb," explained Gret with a laugh.

"Can you get up that early, Miss Vibart?" inquired Bobbie with undue solicitation.

"Of course!" responded that lady indignantly.

"All right, then, Gret; as near eight as ever we possibly can," said Bobbie with an air of finality.

Gret nodded, and pushed off into the stream, smiling as she went. She tied up at the camp landing and went up to prepare Jake for the task ahead of him in the morning. That long-suffering gentleman was meditatively plucking a fowl.

"Another?" laughed Gret, scanning the unfortunate bird and trying by what remained of its feathers to locate it among the flocks she knew. "Don't see how you get them, Jake."

"Easy," laconically. And then he observed in a tone of voice that sufficiently separated the two statements. "I just been up to the Orchards, Gret."

"Well. You did n't bring that from there, did you?" nodding laughingly at the fowl between Jake's knees.

"No, oh no! Got this last night," still meditative. "Say, Gret, I 'll tell you one thing and that ain't two. Robin Start 's a darned fool."

"Yes?" Gret sat down carefully on the sack of potatoes in front of Jake.

"Yes," went on Jake impressively. "He 's just a fool, that 's what he is, with his talk of Portland. Now you mind me, Gret. If he goes to Portland, or any other place, his uncle 'll die and old Widow Bennett will have that place deeded on to her so tight that it 'll make Robin's head swim."

Gret's apathy vanished, and her eyes opened wide. Robin as a chum and running partner was a back number, but Robin, or any other friend or associate, in danger

of being injured or defrauded was quite another matter, though she did not immediately accept Jake's assertions as fact.

"What makes you think that?" she demanded. "I don't believe old man Start ever would deed the ranch to Widow Bennett. What business would she have with it?"

"All right, now—you 'll see," predicted Jake sagely. "It 's not the first time I 've seen that racket worked. She 's not the first woman by a good many that 's stepped in with an old man at the last minute and got what should have gone to others. Course, Start 's not so old as all that; but he 's quite old enough for a woman to fool. There 's no telling," added Jake with sad philosophy, "when a man ain't. Besides, the old man Start is n't going to live very long neither," said Jake decidedly.

Gret regarded Jake with steady interest. "Well, but, Jake, why should Uncle Start take to Widow Bennett all of a sudden? She 's been with them for years, and I never heard that he—"

Jake wagged his head wisely. "When a man 's sick, and a woman begins to do for him, that 's the time she gets her work in. You get kind of dependent on them, and then if they know anything at all they can just wind you all up."

"And does Widow Bennett know anything at all?" queried Gret smiling.

"You bet she does. She 's just managing things in fine style." Jake laughed.

Suddenly Gret rose, a little impatient frown on her face. "I 'm going up to the Orchards right now, Jake," she observed with a nod of the head. "When I come back I 'll tell you what I think."

Gret went on her errand in her own deliberate way, neither turning aside nor hurrying overmuch. She paused at the head of the slough to listen to an altercation

between the engineer and one of the skid hands, and she held a conversation with Eva on the bluff from out the boat as she prepared to row round the bend. Eva was reading a "lovely book," whose motif she wished to impart and discuss, and Gret promised to get home early. But never once did her mind really wander from the matter in hand, and as she tied the boat at the Start landing she observed with satisfaction that the old man was sitting on the porch.

Gret's face was a study in amiable nothingness as she walked through the orchard up to the house and seated herself on the porch steps a little below where the old man sat.

"Well, Uncle Start," she observed with smiling familiarity.

"Well, Gret," responded he, regarding her with friendly curiosity. As far as his interest in her went he had rather liked Gret from a little girl up. Something in her blunt, purposeful make-up attracted him, who had always been himself a man of few words and much work.

"You have n't been around much lately, Gret," he remarked then. "What you been doing with yourself?"

"Minding other people's business mostly," replied Gret coolly, her eyes resting a moment on the old man's face. Jake was quite right; a certain drawn, chalky look had come over it, it seemed to Gret, even since she last saw him.

Mrs. Bennett came into the doorway behind them, and Gret fancied there was an alert, inquiring look in the comely widow's eyes, but was willing to make due allowances for imagination, knowing she had come seeking just such signs as these. She made a mental note, though, of the fact that she had come uncalled to the door at all. She had not been wont to do so, and it struck Gret just in a passing way that she had probably thought it Robin

talking and had grown into the habit of interrupting tête-à-têtes. Seeing Gret, she was reassured and smiled pleasantly. Supposing she really had any plans Gret was the last person in the world she would suspect of either interest or desire to frustrate.

"Well!" she ejaculated in jesting surprise. "Not very often we see you nowadays, Gret. Expect you 've got lots of company down at the mill-house."

"I never go into the mill-house," said Gret, truthfully enough.

"No?" surprised, and sinking with her pleasant, unassertive familiarity into a seat near the old man. "Not very sociable, are they—those ladies?"

"Oh, sociable enough in their way, I suppose," replied Gret non-committally. And then, changing the subject with the ease of one not particularly interested in anything. "Has Rob been to get you any blackberries yet, Mrs. Bennett?"

"No, he has n't," wistfully. "I guess they 're mostly all gone, are n't they?"

"No—oh, well, yes, perhaps so, just in the well-known places," said Gret. "But I know a patch, on a west slope—my! Mrs. Bennett, you should just see them; big as tame berries, almost."

"Well!" said Mrs. Bennett, with enthusiasm. "Fine they are to put up, too. I 'd like awfully well to have some."

"I 'm going to pick all day to-morrow for Lizzie and Jake to put up," went on Gret; "and I just thought if Robin had not picked already he could go along, and I 'd show him my patch. Can't possibly pick them all myself," she added, as an artistic toning down of a possibly unnatural display of generosity.

It never occurred to either of her listeners that Gret really was showing an unusual amount of kindly fore-

thought, or that she was just as likely to know what Robin had and had not done as they themselves.

"Perhaps he might go," observed Mrs. Bennett gently.

"Where is he now?" inquired Gret.

"Goodness knows," put in the old man with cold sarcasm. "Come here at meal times and you 're sure to find him. But that 's about all."

Gret smiled as she noted the heartfelt disgust in the tones of old Start's voice. "Oh, no doubt I shall run across him somewhere," she remarked lightly. "If not, just tell him to come up to camp to-morrow morning very early."

"I 'll tell him you said to come," agreed Mrs. Bennett with gentle amiability. "Robin 's too big now for us to tell him to go do this, or do that."

"We 're never too big for that," said Gret hypocritically. She did not wish them to suppose her an especial advocate of Robin's. In that case they would hardly air any of their views concerning him and his ways, and she would have no opportunity of judging in the matter.

"Some people are," observed Start; "and they 're mostly those that ain't worth a cent themselves—just owe all they 've got to others."

Gret nodded in grave assent, and Mrs. Bennett stroked creases in her apron. In reality Gret wanted to laugh aloud; they were so like two children reciting their parts to her. But it certainly would not do to laugh at this stage of the proceedings, and so she sat in a state of becoming gravity. No one spoke, and Gret turned over in her mind for an auspicious and profitable opening. Her eyes fell on the long rows of strawberry plants traversing one side of the orchard.

"Have a good crop of berries this year?" she inquired of Start.

"Not so very—no," replied the old man, glancing with

stern disfavor at the plants in question. "You see I 've been most too sick all summer to tend to things. I used to think that when Robin grew up and I was old, he 'd take over the management of the ranch. But seems it 's not to be. The farm that gave him a home when he had n't none, but was just a homeless young one on the face of the earth, is the last thing he thinks of now. You can see for yourself."

Gret glanced round critically. Just immediately round the house was spick and span and carefully kept; Mrs. Bennett saw to that. But farther than that a general air of negligence pervaded the place. Gret's lip curled insensibly. Robin always was a fool, always had been lazy, too, for that matter; of duty Gret did not think in connection with Robin. In reality, she reflected, the loss that seemed imminent would serve him just about right, and no more. He had invited it, and he richly deserved it. But Robin had been a playmate and regarded her as a friend, and it was against her nature to see him supplanted by an alien to the family, however just such a consummation might be, without at least giving timely warning. She concluded her rapid survey of the surroundings.

"You 're right," she said laconically, with a glance at the old man.

"Oh well, you see it 's like this," said Mrs. Bennett in an apologetic way. "Some people just naturally don't like the country and ranching and such like, and some does. Robin don't like the country; never did. He never took interest in it and never could. He 's not to blame. It 's just the way people are born, I suppose."

"Certainly," agreed old Start with a smile. "It 's the way they 're born. Some are born shiftless and good for nothing and some ain't."

"Now, I 'd just pine to death in a town," went on the

widow, gazing thoughtfully out across the orchard. "It 's what I 've kept on working and put by my little savings for—just so I could maybe buy me a little place out here in the quiet when I get old—real old. But as for Robin," she went on more briskly, "his ambition 's not that way; that 's all. He just wants to go and be a business man."

"The sooner the better," observed Start.

"That 's what I say," agreed Mrs. Bennett, with an inquiring glance at Gret. "Let him go all nice and friendly-like. There is n't no work here but what can be hired done. There 's no occasion to feel badly about it. The boy 's not to blame. His heart 's not here with us old folks and the old ranch. That 's only natural. Old folks just want to be quiet and comfortable, but young folks are ambitious."

"That 's right." Gret smiled assent, her eyes resting on the suave widow's face. She was doing her work with a very fair amount of artistic perception. Possibly she was overdoing it a little, but then her subjects were not discriminating. Gret wondered rather that she had not before discerned the latent diplomatic possibilities in this woman. There was a time—and Gret smiled to herself to think of it—when she might have had to cross diplomatic swords with the crafty widow herself. She wondered which would have come off victor.

As it was, knowing all she wished to know, she now prepared to gracefully withdraw.

"Well, I suppose I must be going," she observed, drawing her feet together on the step and carefully inspecting a short rip on the front of one of her shoes.

"Oh, what 's the hurry? Stay and have some supper with us," said Mrs. Bennett.

"Oh, thank you, but I can't stay," replied Gret, rising and smiling very pleasantly. "I 've got to hurry back to

the camp to tell Jake about putting up lunches for to-morrow. And then after that Eva wants me."

"Oh, well, then, of course—" agreed Mrs. Bennett smilingly. "Come up again, Gret."

"I will." Gret nodded in a friendly way. Indeed, she really did not feel the slightest personal animosity in the case. She did not blame Widow Bennett at all. It was a business deal all the way through, and the race was to him that could. She stepped down on to the walk and then paused. "Please tell Robin when he comes home that I said to be in camp to-morrow at half past seven."

The indifference fell from her face for a moment, and the "I said" had a strange ring of power and command. Mrs. Bennett glanced up in involuntary surprise; and then Gret added with a little laugh, "I'd hate to see those lovely berries spoil, and I can't pick enough for you and Jake and Lizzie."

"Of course not," agreed Mrs. Bennett immediately. "I'll be sure and tell him."

"All right, then. Good-by." And with a parting smile to each of the unsuspecting subjects of her investigation, Gret departed through the orchard and up the river.

Supper was partly over as Gret entered the camp and took her usual seat on Dick's right hand. Dick looked up from wholesale consumption of baked potatoes and smiled, and Oly voiced a sentiment with his mouth full of the same.

"Thought you were n't going to take supper with us any more, Gret."

"Why?" inquired that lady calmly.

"Been two weeks since you did."

"Just nine days," with an air of exactness.

"Well, that's just the same," grumbled Oly.

"You won't think so if you ever come to pay rent every two weeks," chuckled Cassidy.

"Would n't think so if he got paid for nine days instead of two weeks, either," added Gret, looking up. As she did so she noticed Jake standing in the doorway eying her with inquiring gaze. Guessing the inquiry in his mind, she smiled, and immediately her mind went back to the Orchards. Doubtless Mrs. Bennett had got supper, too, by this, and was ministering to her master's wants with watchful care. The only thing that annoyed Gret about the whole matter was the maturity of it. Right in her immediate proximity, yet without her even suspecting its existence, had this thing hatched out and grown to full perfection.

"I wish," she said with a little snap, and speaking from the depths of her soliloquy, "I wish I were a spider."

Dick looked up from his plate, and Oly's hand, on its way to the potato bowl, paused midway. "Why?" came in chorus.

"Then I 'd have eyes that would look front and backwards and sideways and all."

Most of the men within hearing chuckled, and Dick smiled broadly. "I think your eyes about manage that already, Gret," he observed.

Gret's face relaxed into a smile. She reflected that to those in ignorance of the trend of her deliberations the remark just made might appear a trifle eccentric. She vouchsafed no explanations, however, but went on with her meal, on her face a queer, half humorous, half piqued expression.

After dinner Gret went and seated herself on the bench outside the cook-house door, where she was soon joined by Jake.

"Well?" interrogated he.

Gret nodded. "It 's all right. You 'd got it down right enough."

In view of this frank admission of his penetration and

acumen Jake refrained from any self-laudatory remarks, and awaited further statements.

"And I 'll tell you, Jake," went on Gret with that grim narrowing of the eyes, "if Rob were to lose that place root and tree it would be no more than right. It 's just a shame the way he 's neglecting things now the old man 's sick."

Jake nodded. "That 's what I think. Better just let it go."

"Oh, no!" demurred Gret. "He may have sense enough to turn over a new leaf when he sees how things are going. If he does n't after we 've shown him, then it 's his fault."

Then she rose deliberately. "Well, I must go. Eva wants me. Oh, say, Jake, I was almost forgetting," turning back. "I want you to put up six lunches for to-morrow. Will you?"

"Six," ejaculated Jake.

"Yes. All the mill-house folks are going berrying to-morrow."

"Land—six!" Jake shook his head.

"I 'll get up real early and help," said Gret coaxingly. "I 'll cut all the sandwiches, Jake."

Jake smiled. "Well, guess I 've got enough pie," he said then, with a sigh of resignation.

"Oh, yes. We 'll make out," said Gret confidently. "Well, I 'll be down early in the morning, Jake," she said finally, and with a nod of adieu went out of the kitchen.

She went home and lay on the bluff with Eva and the lovely book. The river flowed in molten light, speared across with lengthening pine shadows; and Robin and the Orchards and the blackberrying and all things troublesome whatsoever were put on one side and forgotten as if they had never been.

CHAPTER XIII

A DAY'S ENJOYMENT

VERY early in the morning Gret awoke; the sunlight was streaming across the floor, and the room was full of the moist dawn, odorous with the breath of pines and plants. She sat up and gave a little sigh of pure delight; then she sprang up and going to the window leaned out. The rose mists lay deep among the pines, and the river wound in and out a thread of palest blue.

Gret drew her head in and dressed, her soul rising in glee within her. She was a lion refreshed, and the world was not wide enough for her to conquer.

When the blackberrying toilet was complete, she crept down the lean-to roof, leaped to the ground, and was off like a deer for the camp.

Arrived at the camp, she found Jake and Charlie busy with breakfast preparations. And so Gret busied herself cutting a pile of thinly sliced bread ready for the sandwiches.

A little before eight o'clock Robin arrived at the camp. The expression on his face could hardly be construed into one of pleased anticipation; apparently the idea of a day's blackberrying with Gret no longer held the charm it had in days of yore. Gret marked the expression, but did not choose to take open note of it. Instead she was very gracious, and hailed him in terms of good fellowship.

"Hallo, Robbie! So Mother Bennett told you to come."

"Oh, yes. She was bound she 'd have those berries," said Robin a trifle discontentedly. "There was no getting out of it."

"Well, did you want to?" inquired Gret brightly. "All the mill folks are going. Why, I just thought you 'd like to go."

"Oh, are they?" Robin looked more interested. "Oh!"

"Yes; Miss Vibart, too," said Gret, with eyes gleaming mockery and amusement.

"Oh!" Robin's face brightened amazingly. "Where are you going, Gret? Mother Bennett said you had a splendid patch somewhere or other."

"I have; berries as big as that," and Gret illustrated with her thumb and finger a berry about as big as a good-sized bantam egg. "You know the mountain back of Murray's camp?" Robin nodded. "Well, the west side of that. It 's covered with salal—deep salal, too—and that keeps the berries from drying up. They 're just thick there."

Robin nodded his comprehension. "But can Miss Vibart get along among stuff like that, do you suppose?" he inquired.

Gret's lips slowly melted into a smile of the broadest possible dimensions. "That 's what we shall see!" she said.

Robin looked up into the eyes dancing with fun, and his soul expanded as of old. Here once more was the girl who had been wont to go into ecstasies of silent laughter when he fell off a log, or stubbed his toe when his pail was full of berries; whose dancing feet he had followed from childhood alike in willingness and reluctance, and alike to his profit or undoing. His face relaxed into one of the old comprehensive grins.

"I guess it will be funny, all right!" he observed.

More punctually than Gret had altogether expected, the mill-house party arrived, variously attired according to their varied conceptions of the task in hand. Gret scanned Maude's appearance with considerable interest. As far as that lady could possibly judge of the expedition about

to be entered upon it was the perfection of good sense and taste; but Gret's experienced eye detected several pitfalls. The wide-brimmed straw sailor was all right, as was also the plain but dainty gown of blue linen; but the starched white collar was a vanity that would soon wither away, and the stout-soled walking-shoes, which Maude in view of the rough nature of the ground to be covered had considered the best, were badly chosen seeing that the main foothold in the dense brush and seas of salal would be on fallen timber. On the other hand, Maude surveyed Gret in much secret surprise, from the wide straw hat, conical-crowned and innocent of trimming and faded waist whose loose collar-band was left in its simplicity, to the thinnest of old shoes.

Gret solemnly presented each of the men with a ten-pound lard-pail, in which was his lunch. She herself carried two pails, one within the other, as did also Robin. Maude was given a five-pound pail, as being probably equal to any demand she might put upon it.

To begin with, the way lay up the skid-road, and upon this Robin and Gret jumped with the ease of long acquaintanceship. Maud was helped up, and the other men followed with more or less enthusiasm. And here happened the first of Maude's disasters. Observing the ease of Gret's progress, Miss Vibart essayed the balancing act herself with much confidence, and promptly collapsed with a little screech between the big sleepers. She was helped out, and then decided to walk alongside the road, over the baked mud and clumps of bramble and brush. Ludlowe and Massinger walked with her and all went well, except that the band-snakes, sunning themselves in harmless abandon, were the source of many sudden stop-pages and much screaming. Robin and Gret balanced and pirouetted along a little way ahead, taking in the whole proceedings with joyous appreciation.

From the top of the cañon Murray's trail was struck, and after this every one got along famously. Maude recovered from her mishap of the skid-road, and, helped on her way by ready gallantry, decided that expeditions into the brush were exactly to her taste.

The ground to which Gret conducted her party was the lower western slope of a hill leading into a shallow ravine. Over the inevitable fallen timber with which the ages had latticed the side of the hill the salal grew into a smooth green sea, out of which stood clumps of huckle- and salmon-berry bushes, dogwood and hazel. At the edge of it Gret called a halt to empty the buckets.

"Would n't think it would be a good berry-patch at all, would you?" observed Robin, surveying it critically.

"No, but it is—fine," replied Gret. "They 're all among the salal—big, juicy ones. And I 'll tell you," she added with a knowing nod, "there are places where you can drop off a log six feet into the salal if you want to."

Robin shut one eye in a prodigious wink. The schemes of maturity were all forgotten for the moment, and he was a mischievous boy again.

The luncheon supplies were stacked in a shady hollow beneath a thick clump of bushes, and the group went gleefully to work. Before allowing her to start off into the salal, however, Gret took Maude by the hand and led her to the foot of a thick tangle of brier and bush. She lifted the growth, and displayed to that uninitiated lady a cluster of shining blue-black berries. Maude gave a little coo of delight, and sitting down began to pick with enthusiasm. Ludlowe, observing the comparative ease of the situation, came and seated himself by her side and also began to lazily transfer a few of the berries from the parent bush to his pail. Bobbie and Massinger prospected cautiously along the timber into the salal, and Gret went back to Robin, who stood waiting for her.

"That 'll get the berry fever up," said he, indicating by a bend of the head Maude and her patch.

Gret nodded, and struck off down a slender prostrate tree, followed by Robin. Half-way down she paused and, parting the salal and bramble that grew over the rotting bark, disclosed clusters of berries. "You see," she said contentedly, "we could fill a water-pail if we wanted to."

"Yes, could n't we?" agreed Robin, seating himself astride the tree and beginning to pick. "Funny we never found this patch before, all these years."

"Well, it 's out of the way we always went to berry," rejoined Gret, seating herself carefully. "I just happened on it coming down from Molalla one day."

"Been up to Molalla lately, then?" inquired Robin. Gret nodded.

"Alone?"

"No," nodding her head in Massinger's direction. "He was with me."

Robin scanned Massinger's tall, slight figure critically. "Rather taken up with him, are n't you?"

Gret looked up, a berry held to her lips. "Why, I like him—yes. No one could very well help that; he 's so good."

"Should n't have thought the goody-goody kind would have taken you at all," went on Robin thoughtfully.

"I don't exactly know what you mean by 'taken me,' " said Gret with a laugh. "You can't help liking a person who always thinks of every one else before himself, and is kind and fair to everything. Besides, he likes to rove all about just as I do. I 'm not taken any further than that."

"Think you ever will really like anybody?" wondered Robin, looking curiously into the girl's unmoved face.

Gret chuckled—a mere little grunt of discontent and

scorn. "I don't think I 'll ever like anything that 'll like me," she replied oracularly.

Robin was silent a moment, and Gret suddenly changed the subject.

"Uncle Start was telling me yesterday that you thought of going to Portland."

The look of mischievous curiosity vanished instantaneously from Robin's face and he glanced quickly and furtively at his companion.

"Yes," he said, with an attempt at carelessness.

She nodded. "Very good idea, I should think," in a voice of no particular interest; "because you never did like ranching really, did you?"

"No, never did," agreed Robin, brightening immediately as he saw no opposition was likely to be forthcoming. "The old man 's sore about it, though, is n't he?"

"Oh—said he 'd have to hire the work done," said Gret evasively.

"Well, that 's the best thing. Don't you think so?" asked Robin quickly.

"Of course. You don't do the work, and what 's the good of keeping some one else out of it," agreed Gret in a matter-of-fact way. "I 'm only surprised you did n't both come to some agreement of that sort a long time ago."

"Did you tell uncle that?" inquired Robin eagerly.

"Oh, forget now what I did say—something of the kind," replied the girl. "It 's none of my business anyway. When are you going?"

"Just as soon as Cecil can get me a place," explained Robin eagerly. "You see, just now, in the middle of the summer, it 's very quiet in the dry-goods business; but just as soon as fall sets in business picks up, and then they put more clerks on. Cecil says he 's sure he can get me a position in his store."

"Won't that be nice?" sympathized Gret. "And then Cecil can show you what to do and all that."

"Of course. He 'll put me next to everything," said Robin, delighted with such ready comprehension.

"Do you think you 'll like to live in town?" queried Gret.

"Will I?" echoed Robin, his whole face beaming with enthusiasm. "You see," he went on confidentially, "I 'll learn the dry-goods business, and then—then, some day I 'll go in business for myself and have Cecil with me. See? As Cecil says, it would n't do to go into a business you knew nothing about."

"Of course not," acquiesced Gret amiably, as she turned away to reach for a trailing, well-laden bramble.

About fifty feet away, picking with great deliberation, and, as far as Bobbie was concerned at all events, chattering at double the speed, were Bobbie and Massinger. Maude having embarked on a fallen tree, piloted by Gret, glanced round contentedly, and then stooping began to pick the berries lying across the trunk.

"I suppose," she said to Robin, who was within speaking distance, "one can walk anywhere here—no swamp or anything of that kind?" And she looked critically at the smooth, inviting expanse of salal.

"Oh, yes," responded Robin in tones of deep assurance; "the ground is all just as dry and hard as can be."

He never, as he afterward assured Gret, expected such immediate results to follow his words. But Miss Vibart decided to prospect farther round the cluster of berries she was at present dealing with. Rising, she picked up her pail and stepped forward. There was a shriek, a shower of berries in the air, and Miss Vibart vanished from mortal ken.

Robin, in reality paralyzed past all usefulness by laughter, ran to the brink and peered into the salal, which

had closed peacefully over the spot; and Ludlowe, Arthur and Bobbie hastened thither as fast as uncertain foothold would allow. Together, with much acclaim, they rescued the vanished one from her leafy grave, physically none the worse for her experience, but considerably ruffled in spirit and attire.

Gret all this time remained quietly seated some distance up the log, apparently unnoticing and entirely engrossed with the berry-picking. But when, about ten minutes afterward, she had so far recovered from her fit of silent laughter as to be able to sit up once more, she felt the smooth, long fingers of a man's hand slip under her chin, and her face was raised to meet the quizzical eyes of Errol Ludlowe.

"Ah!" said that gentleman calmly. "I thought as much."

Presently Maude, better instructed as to how to walk amidst salal brush, and encouraged by much sympathy and the contributions of berries from other pails to make up for the loss of her own, started afresh on her career as a berry-picker. She considered Robin the prime agent of her disaster, and told him so.

"You said I could walk anywhere," she observed in offended tones.

"So you can," returned Robin in injured accents. "The ground is quite dry and hard. But I supposed you'd get down off the log first, and not try to walk on the top of the salal." And Maude was silenced.

Gret sat on, automatically picking berries, but with her thoughts on other things. The touch of fingers was still about her throat and chin, shaping into other channels the mood that had beforetime been so mirthful. The smile on her lips was half reflective, half comprehensive, and faintly sweet.

When the party returned to the camp that night, Jake

invited them all to be seated in the dining-hall while he prepared for them a quick repast, the camp dinner being long since over. The mill-house people, not having been able to set any definite time for their return, and not, therefore, expecting anything to be in readiness for them at the mill, accepted the invitation, and the whole berry party sat down together to supper. Afterward the mill people took their berries and, with many thanks to the graciously smiling Jake, went home rejoicing.

Robin did not happen to come into the camp for several days; but finally Gret walked casually into the cook-house one afternoon to find him there with Jake.

Gret did not, of course, expect Robin to take with any degree of pleasure the information—or suspicions—to be imparted to him, but she was hardly prepared for the state of rage in which she found him. His face was red, and it seemed to the amused girl that his hair fairly stood on end.

"I tell you, Robin," Jake was saying in kindly tones, "it 's none of my business. I don't care which of you gets the ranch. Only I kind of hate to see you make such a fool of yourself—if you don't know it, that is. But don't you take my word for it—or Gret's either. Just you go home and keep your eyes peeled, and you 'll soon see for yourself."

Here Gret entered the field. "Yes," she laughed, "he will. And just as soon as he sees anything that points to what we say being true, he 'll jump up and come down on Widow Bennett with all four feet and row with his uncle."

"Well, it 's all off with him if he does," said Jake positively.

"Yes, and, besides, if old lady Bennett ever finds out that Rob is on to her game she 'll quietly find some other way of fixing him," added Gret.

"Sure," agreed Jake amiably. "There 's more ways than one of killing a cat always."

"I won't say anything," said Robin, his eyes full of a sullen rage; "but I 'm just going right home and watch. I believe you 've got on the wrong street altogether. But I 'll soon see."

"That 's right," assented Jake. "You will—mighty soon, too, now your eyes are open; that is, unless you 're a bigger fool than I take you for. And say, Rob," as that gentleman turned to the door, "when you 've made up your mind, come and tell us."

Robin nodded, and went out, slowly and almost dejectedly. He was enraged to the heart's core, and though on the whole unbelieving, yet secretly very considerably startled. He had been, as usual, chasing just the one idea to the exclusion of everything else. At the same time, though rash and unthinking in a general way, he was not by any means a fool. When he did actually get down to the consideration of a matter, he was usually able to see pretty well on all sides of it. Indeed, he was crafty by nature, and, although the impulsive streak in his composition generally bent alike his energies and his craft in one channel at a time, yet by the insight thus afforded him he was well able both to measure the craftiness of another and to meet it on equal grounds. By the time he had reached the Orchards he had reviewed a considerable portion of the widow's actions of late, and had come to the conclusion that, as far as she was concerned, Jake might easily be right in his surmises. But he could not bring himself to believe that his uncle would ever will the well-beloved ranch, upon which his life's labors had been spent, out of the family and to a woman.

During the following week he worked closely about the farm, and no move, no word, on the part of either the widow or his uncle escaped him. And one thing he did

realize, if nothing else, and that was the depth of his uncle's dislike and disgust for himself. And on the strength of this alone Robin knew it would never do to go away and leave the place unguarded in the hands of the enemy.

Sadly disappointed and dejected, yet once more in his right mind, Robin went back to the camp one morning and confessed that Jake was right, or nearly so, forlornly adding that all his future hopes were dashed to the ground.

Then Jake and Gret administered much consolation and more advice. He was coached to the last detail of his procedure. He was solemnly adjured not for anything to let the widow suspect he had recognized her designs, but to still talk to her of his city plans; he was to quietly set to work and bring the ranch into proper shape, being patient and courteous to his uncle in the face of anything and everything; and he was to begin, when the widow was not present, in a wisely graduated way to plan with his uncle the future of the ranch.

Robin listened resignedly, but heeded withal. Indeed, he was obliged to heed, for, when all was said and done the ranch was the basis of even his dream of Portland. When that was gone, all else faded with it. For Robin was quite shrewd enough to know that even the good friend Cecil would be very much less of a friend if Robin came to him merely as a penniless man instead of as one with prospects of a comfortable start in life.

There was no help for it—nothing to do but stand by his post; and Robin was a forlorn being. Time would doubtless shortly supply him with a new motive for living, with the necessary something to pursue; but just now he had but one object in view, and that was the undoing of the Widow Bennett.

CHAPTER XIV

FAINT SHAPES OF THE FUTURE

IT was a surprising thing that almost every one, including those who from their fairly correct estimate of her character should have known better, during the summer made the mistake of supposing Gret to have conceived a more or less decided fancy for Arthur Massinger, and he for her. The very unblushing, matter-of-fact openness of her monopoly of the young minister should have been sufficient disproof to those who in other ways had measured fairly well the intense secretiveness of her nature. But it seemed it was not. For once the deductions of the various and in the main kindly observers were at fault, and a general mistake obtained.

Arthur really had become very fond of the girl, it is true; and, like every one else whom Gret towed into the strong stream of her personality, had come to be almost unable to imagine life without her; but there was no love, as from man to woman. There probably never had been very much passion in Arthur's physical make-up, and what little there might have been his esthetic life and principles had gradually eliminated. But he had turned to Gret as the strongest and, to him, most inspiring personality he had ever met. With her he literally forgot his weakness. It seemed to him that, when she stood before him in that intense, conscious delight in being that was one of her great charms, and breathed one of her deep, swelling breaths, she actually breathed into his nos-

trils a magnetic vitality that carried him along and made him forget that ever there was a weak body that sometimes failed to carry out the demands of an eager spirit.

And as for Gret, she was sorry for Massinger; and, as she had truthfully said to Robin, she recognized the sweetness and beauty of his disposition and sincerely liked him. None could well be with him and help that. But love? No! Great was the mistake of those who supposed that Gret would love and carry her love openly through the rounds of her life for the whole world to see and comment on.

And then Gret was very much taken with Arthur's description of his life-work among the outcasts of society, and her sympathies were extended instantly and unquestioningly to the women whose unhappiness he portrayed in a tender, pitying way. He spoke of them always as "poor unfortunates," and of course Gret had not the faintest idea in the world of the real offense of these women against that society which cast them out and held them at bay. She took them to be poor, homeless, friendless, sick—something evidently that caused them to be in trouble and misery; and her soul rose up in wrath at the more fortunate women whom Arthur sometimes sadly depicted as thrusting still further down, and ostracizing still more hopelessly, their fallen sisters. And when he told her of the difficulty he at all times encountered in getting kind and helpful housekeepers, or, indeed, housekeepers of any kind, on account of contact with these girls, her disgust was simply too great for words. She had at once that pity, entirely irrespective of caste or kind, which religion alone had been able to supply to Arthur himself.

Partly because she would not, for the sake of the love Arthur evidently bore the theme, hurt his feelings by attacking it, and partly because she encouraged any and every discussion that gave insight into his and other men's

lives, and partly because of a certain enjoyment it afforded her, Gret heard with apparently receptive interest all that Arthur ever said concerning his religion—the softly uttered, loving praise of the Divine Master, the faith in His power and the joy in His service. To do her justice, she was artist enough to recognize the beauty of the idea, even while she smiled at it as a pretty fable, and Arthur's finely rounded, tuneful sentences fell on appreciative ears. But that was all. As for any interest in religion, or any idea of becoming converted thereto herself, that was merely one of the grim, secret jokes in which Gret reveled. For very early in the day she had divined Arthur's confident hopes of winning her, through her interest and sympathies, for the service of the God he served: and it amused her to humor him.

Ludlowe often joined Gret and Arthur in their various expeditions hither and thither, and was, strange as it may seem, thoroughly amused and content while with them. The man who, in a society gathering, would have been bored to distraction, and who was so unfeignedly and really tired of many things in life, with these two entirely different but equally sincere beings was fairly satisfied. Moreover, Errol Ludlowe had, fortunately for him, never lost his love for nature. The moods and the kinds of his fellow-men had become a matter of easy arithmetic; but the moods and the ways of the Great Mother were still alluringly above and beyond him.

And then Ludlowe considered Gret a most unusually interesting specimen of femininity, whose ultimate development it had pleased him for reasons of his own to calculate to a nicety; and being interested, he was therefore gracious in his lazy, caressing way—a fact which, to Ludlowe's great secret amusement, seemed to cause Arthur some slight perturbation of heart. Being well versed by long observation as to the general results of any attention

to women from Errol, Arthur grew afraid for Gret, and ventured one afternoon to gently intercede for what he considered might be her future peace of mind.

"Errol," he smiled at the end of a period of reflection, and glancing affectionately at his friend, who lay prone on the moss of the river, "we know you are generally not to blame, but there are so many scalps hanging at your belt. Don't add Gret's."

Ludlowe raised his head and looked hard at his companion for a moment, and then laughed. "Why, I have n't the faintest intention of trying to do any such thing—as collect her scalp." His head dropped back on the moss. "Also my innate modesty leads me to enter a protest against your statement."

Arthur smiled. "You never do 'try' to do anything of the kind, but we know what frequently happens nevertheless. Gret is no society flirt and weakling. She would suffer hard and long."

"I quite agree with you—if she ever began to suffer," said Ludlowe coolly. "But falling in love is a diversion in which Gret will indulge only when all other forms of amusement fail, or I am much mistaken. Besides all which, she appears to dislike me—just in a casual way."

Arthur smiled, a faint, unbelieving smile. "Yes? But you like her, don't you?"

"Oh, yes—immensely," responded Errol promptly. "One could n't help it."

And in that he spoke the truth and nothing but it. He did like Gret—more than any woman he knew. It was merely liking as yet, but still a great deal for Ludlowe to extend to a mere chance acquaintance as Gret had promised to be. Very few women had ever roused any greater liking, very few even as much. He liked that downright, wholesome quality about her both for good and bad, and the compelling egotism that went straight to the goal, tak-

ing heed of nothing by the way. He knew that wherever Fate placed her she was going to be a woman to be reckoned with, and he watched her about with contemplative interest. At the same time he did not flatter himself that Gret returned his liking. He did not see that she had any cause to dislike him; but, though not avoiding him, he noticed that she never sought his company. And for this reason, if for none other, out of the pure contradictoriness of his nature, Errol would approach her on all convenient occasions and exert himself to be entertaining—a feat that for a man of such classic training and wide travel and experience was an easy matter, of course, notwithstanding Gret's peculiar tastes. He early discovered that everything presented to her if to be really interesting and acceptable, must be fact, or, if theory, based on a solid foundation of reason. And he was surprised, too, in those early days, at the class and magnitude of the subjects that interested her. When one day he cursorily explained to her such atomic laws as probably governed the formation of planets, Gret sat right down and dived body and soul into the subject; and Ludlowe was kept busy for an hour or more explaining laws of matter, its indestructibleness, probable first causes, protoplasmic theories, and finally the latest electric theories of life. Gret listened, keen-eyed and open-souled, and when one of the men from the mill approached her to say that Mr. Fonselker would greatly like to see her in that flourishing establishment, she came to the earth with a crash.

But notwithstanding the great apparent success of each and every conversation held, Gret never voluntarily sought to repeat it; and Ludlowe finally concluded that something or other in his manner must repel her. But this conclusion did not alter or in any way affect his procedure. He talked to her whenever he felt inclined or opportunity presented, and his manner, careless, indulgent,

and sometimes faintly imperative, remained the same. A faint, puzzled frown would sometimes knit Gret's brow when bidden, in a quiet voice that yet left no room for disobedience, to do this or that thing which previously she had either decided not to do at all or had not yet considered. She could not see any particular reason for obeying, and yet there hardly appeared anything else to do. So she generally obeyed.

"Come here, Gret," he called one afternoon from his favorite basking-spot by the river's brink, having observed that young lady entering a boat and preparing to row down stream. He probably would not have interrupted her intention but that, instead of rowing swiftly off with her usual promptitude of action, she drew the oars across her knees and sat quiet. Ludlowe could not see her face, only a bent head and clear-cut profile; but, with her body leaning slightly over the oars and her hands lying still upon them, she was a beautiful study in repose. She woke with a start when Ludlowe's voice reached her ear, and turned her head sharply to look for him. He bent his head and smiled slightly in repetition of his command, and Gret got out of the boat and went over to where he lay. She stood looking questioningly down on him, and he gazed up at her deliberately, searching in her face for any trace of the thoughts that had just flown.

"It was so amazing to see you sitting still and thinking," he observed, "that I have to comment upon it. What were you thinking so deeply about?"

Gret smiled, probably at the idea that she would be at all likely to retail her thoughts for any one's benefit. "Oh, of all sorts of things," she replied.

"Ever tell any one your inmost thoughts, Gret?" inquired Ludlowe amusedly. "Ever confide in any one at all?"

"What do you mean?" replied Gret carefully.

"Well, I mean, have you any one—a friend—to whom you tell everything? Everything, mind."

"Of course not!" with a prompt laugh.

Ludlowe laughed, too. "I thought not. Extraordinary girl!"

"Why?" asked Gret. "Does any one ever tell everything?"

"Certainly; most women," calmly.

Gret smiled, and mentally reviewed some of the feminine members of her wide, though cursory, acquaintance-ship. "Yes, some women do tell quite a lot," she admitted impartially; "but not everything."

"Not just at first," said Ludlowe. "Not until you have been bosom-friend for at least a week. But sit down, Gret. Where were you going?"

"Down to the mill."

"Well, everything 's all right down there," declared Ludlowe. "I overheard Bobbie say before I came up here that So-and-So's order would go out to-morrow, and somebody else's order was well under way, and that he thought they would be able to get some one else's order out this week after all. So if you were only going down to give business advice you are not needed."

Gret smiled at the not very lucid account of business affairs presented. "I don't believe you 'd make a very good business man. Do you ever have anything to do with business—making things pay, and so on?"

"No. Have stewards to do that, thereby accomplishing two things: getting out of the work and trouble myself, and giving a few other men a chance to live, and live easily. Please sit down, Gret."

Gret slowly obeyed. She picked up a pocket edition of Julius Caesar that lay on the sward near Ludlowe's hand.

"What a wee, pretty book," turning over appreciatively the dainty morocco-bound trifle.

"Yes—Shakspeare. Ever read Shakspeare, Gret?"

"No; never read anything."

"You don't!" surprised. "Why, I thought you seemed to be quite well-read."

"Eva reads, and tells me all about the books every night," explained Gret.

"I see. And why don't you read for yourself, Gret?"

"I would n't have patience. Want to see things."

"I don't quite understand," said Ludlowe. "Do you mean that you must actually see to believe, or that you have no patience to read because you want to be out and about seeing anything and everything that goes on?"

"Both," replied Gret.

"I should imagine," said Ludlowe, "that you 'd make a good traveler. Would you like to travel?"

"Yes, I should," unhesitatingly. "Have you traveled? I don't mean just from one town to another, but all about the world."

"Oh, yes."

"But you 're not doing it now."

"No; had my fill of it years ago. In fact, I came pretty near the end of my list; saw everything worth seeing."

"How quick you must have been," commented Gret sarcastically. "Unless the world 's a very small place."

Ludlowe laughed. "You 're right. I merely meant from a historical or sentimental point of view."

These limitations presented no very lucid idea to Gret, and her brows wrinkled slightly. Ludlowe saw this and explained further.

"You see, when I was fresh from college I was full, of course, of book-lore. With the histories of great dead peoples bright in my mind, I naturally went to view the scenes where they lived and fought and died, and in many instances the ruins they left behind them. That is historical interest."

"Dead peoples," repeated Gret reflectively.

"Yes; the ancient Egyptians, ancient Greeks, Romans—"

"That 's in this book—Romans," said Gret, with her finger on the little Shakspeare. "I saw the word as I picked it up."

"No doubt. That is a Roman play."

"What did they do, the Romans?"

"Many things in their time," smiling. "They were quite energetic."

"Tell me," said Gret in her terse way.

And Ludlowe proceeded to tell, very ornately, and with probably more regard to effect and sentiment than strict historical truth, pressing into service for the task the poet-historians that rose readily from out his well-stored memory. Gret listened, with wide eyes and quivering nostrils. The greater the fight, the greater the odds, the keener her appreciation and interest. She was a born lover of a struggle, it mattered not of what kind. Ludlowe laughed to himself as he saw this, and confined his treatise principally to the most strenuous characters and circumstances of Roman history, concluding with Macaulay's stirring poem on that most intrepid Roman, Horatius, the "Keeper of the Gate."

Gret went through the fight with the three brave men, and stood defiant with Horatius on the farther bank of the Tiber.

" 'Now yield thee!' cried false Sextus,
With a smile on his pale face; "

Gret's lip curled, and Ludlowe preserved gravity with great difficulty.

" 'Now yield thee!' cried Lars Porsena,
'Now yield thee to our grace.' "

Gret fairly snorted defiance, and Ludlowe burst out laughing.

"I knew it!" he laughed. "I knew you were some battle-scarred old Roman reincarnated."

"Go on!" commanded Gret, impatient of the interruption; and Ludlowe proceeded to take Horatius safely back across the Tiber, much to the relief of his listener.

"Don't do that sort of thing nowadays, do they?" she observed at the conclusion, returning to the present era with a sigh.

"Well—no, not exactly. There is n't any hand-to-hand fighting done nowadays. It 's done with machines, like everything else."

"Well, I don't think there are any men who could fight like that now, anyway," declared Gret contemptuously.

"Oh, I don't know," responded Ludlowe in amused protest.

Gret reviewed rapidly all the men of her acquaintance and found them wanting—most of them. Ludlowe divined her thoughts and laughed afresh.

"They may be rather a poor set of specimens that you 've happened to meet," he said quizzically; "but do let 's believe that there are yet a few men left in the world."

"Oh, I suppose so—somewhere," unconsciously crushing. She rose, then, and returned with a little sigh to the needs of the present.

"Where to now?" inquired Ludlowe.

"To dinner. The five-o'clock whistle 's gone."

Ludlowe drew out his watch. "By Jove, so it is. The history class is a great success by way of passing time, even if it does call into derision the present race of mankind; eh, Gret?"

Gret nodded, and Ludlowe lazily got himself up from the bank and stood by her side. "Well, we 'll take the an-

cient Greeks next time, and weigh the case of Helen and Paris against Antony and Cleopatra."

"What did they do?" inquired Gret curiously, stretching one foot across the space that intervened between her boat and the landing and drawing the boat toward her.

"The usual thing," replied Ludlowe, preparing to walk on; "only distance lends enchantment. Adieu, Gret."

"Adieu," responded Gret gravely, with perfect imitation of his accent.

Gret went home and discussed across the dinner-table with her mother and Eva the merits of the heroes of old as compared with those of the present. Since Eva had become so pronounced a book-worm, and since Gret, through Eva, had become fairly conversant with bookish topics, the three found a common and pleasant meeting-ground. And though Mrs. Silway had never attempted to enter into Gret's life when it consisted of merely girlish pranks and escapades, yet she was willing and glad to discuss with the two girls, and hear their views of, subjects outside their own lives. Neither did she wish to limit the subjects to those things external to their lives, for she always enjoyed listening to the short psychological studies of local thought and character frequently presented by the always intensely observant Gret. And Mrs. Silway was quick to note the keen, analytical qualities of the elder girl's mind, wondering sometimes how far it would avail her, whose future, if she was to have one, must evidently be of her own making.

After dinner was over the two girls and the jackdaw repaired to the bluff, as usual. This evening Eva had a magazine whose leading article, "Famous Types of Female Beauty, Past and Present," had taken her attention for the time being. Though not caring so very particularly for them herself, Mrs. Silway had taken of late

years to requesting that copies of the best magazines be included in her boxes of books.

Gret scanned the smiling beauties on the pages before her with severely critical eyes, noting keenly each point wherein the art of the present woman improved on that of the beauty of the past. Neither did she fail to observe that the big, fluffy pompadour, falling softly over one side the brow of the most famous type of modern American beauty, was that night faithfully reproduced in Eva's pretty, wavy hair. The plain cotton shirt-waist, too, was pouched gracefully in required fashion in front, and at the back pulled down carefully to form the short straight line. Gret was slightly amused and altogether approving. She considered Eva by far the prettiest girl in the locality, or, in fact, of anything she had ever seen in the way of a girl, and whatever was calculated to further set off this undeniable superiority of looks was both justifiable and advisable.

"Of course," said Eva thoughtfully; "it's easy to dress up for some special occasion and look nice."

"Yes, perhaps. Better if some of them had n't dressed up so much, though," said the exacting Gret. "Just look how horrid those curls look," scrutinizing a famous Gainsborough beauty with unadmiring eyes. "Exactly like sausages!"

Eva laughed. "Yes, they do—in the picture. I don't suppose they did, though, themselves—I mean, in life. Janice Meredith wore curls like that, Gret. Don't you remember how it showed her on the cover of the book?"

Gret nodded, but her eyes and attention were turned down to the river. A gang of the boys came down from the camp, and with much laughter and shouting rowed off down the river. They would not go down to Quellish as late as this—week-day night, too; and besides they were such a mixed lot, men of such diverse tastes. Gret

wondered exceedingly. Where could they be going? She half opened her lips to hail them, but desisted. Her mother was reading on the porch and she was pronounced in her dislike of hearing Gret hail people from the bluff.

In a few minutes Gret's wonder increased. Another group came down the board-walk, this time comprising Dick, Jake, the foreman feller and other responsible spirits of the camp. Evidently something was going on down the river, and Gret grew indignant to think she had not been duly informed. The peace of the evening was broken, all literary interest dispelled, and Gret fidgeted on the grass. And then presently the last straw arrived in the shape of Robin rowing energetically down-stream.

That was too much. Gret jumped up. "Evie, I won't be a minute. I just want to ask Rob what 's going on."

She swooped down the bluff steps, and Robin, seeing her, dutifully swerved toward her. "Are you coming?" he shouted.

"Coming where?" demanded Gret with traces of indignation.

"Why, to the camp-meeting. Did n't you know?"

"No, of course not! Nobody told me."

"That 's funny," reaching out a hand for the landing. "Everybody knows. Widow McCarty's got a real camp preacher—fine shouter, they say—and she 's going to have a revival meeting on the marsh outside her house. Going to be a bonfire when it gets real dusk, and everything. Jump in!"

A shadow fell on Gret's face. "I can't, I 'm afraid, Rob. I was just with Evie, and—"

"Well, bring her along," promptly. Robin had never taken very much notice of Eva, but he did not suppose she would be any particular damper on the proceedings.

"I don't think she 'd come," said Gret. "She never will go anywhere. . . . Look here!" suddenly. "You come

up with me, and while I run and ask mother, you talk for all you 're worth to Eva so that she won't have time to think whether she 'll go or not. See?"

Robin climbed out in a moment, accustomed of old to obeying Gret's commands. Together they charged up the bank, and while Gret ran on across to her mother, Robin overwhelmed with a perfect torrent of words the astonished Eva. He was at the same time astonished himself. He had known Eva all his life of course, but during the last year or two he had been coming to the Silway house very little. And during this time Eva had transformed herself into a real young lady, and a very reserved and grown-upish one at that. He was surprised. So was Eva. Robin was so big and tall when he came close; and then he had a way of carrying one off one's feet and giving one no time to think.

Mrs. Silway was amused when Gret asked whether Robin might take her and Eva to a camp-meeting down at Widow McCarty's. The name, camp-meeting, was redolent of old Southern days.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," she said. "I don't see why not. Don't be late, though."

"I don't know how long it lasts," answered Gret truthfully. "But if it 's very late we can come away before it ends."

She rushed into the house for her own hat and Eva's, and then back to the bluff. And as she had directed, Eva was down the steps and into the boat before she had much chance to realize what had happened.

"There 'll be heaps of people there, and nobody 'll bother about us," observed Gret soothingly to Eva, picking up oars as she spoke and helping to send the boat like a rocket down the stream.

As far as the number of people was concerned, Gret was right. The prospective audience—men and boys

principally, though there was a fair sprinkling of women—were already seated on every available log and mound on the little marsh before the widow's cottage when they arrived on the scene. On the edge of the marsh, near the river, over a heap of oiled gunny sacks, a pile of wood was erected, to which some enterprising youths, in whose eyes, doubtless, the bonfire was the main attraction, were adding anything and everything inflammable within sight. But in her prediction that no one would notice them Gret was very wide of the mark. They became immediately the center of attraction, not, of course, on account of either Gret or Robin, but of Eva. The women eyed her critically and curiously, and the men without exception admiringly. To most of those present her existence was known well enough; but of late years few had had an opportunity to notice the girl at close range. And then, again, to some of them she was a complete stranger.

Every soul present was known to Gret, and she glanced round with alert, interested eyes; but Eva felt the keen scrutiny given her and shrank back a little. And when Gret, unthinking of her sister's mental discomfort, darted here and there to speak to this one and that, she turned her eyes—big, soft eyes of red-brown, with heavy white lids—appealingly on Robin.

"Don't you leave me," she said.

"Oh, I won't," responded Robin gallantly, noticing the admiring glances of the men around and proud to be the escort of the new belle. "Let 's go and sit on the bank near the table. That 's where the preacher 's going to stand to preach."

Eva agreed, and they crossed over. And then when she was seated and no longer a target for all eyes, she felt easier.

The mill-house party turned out in its entirety, even to Mrs. Baring herself. Indeed, that lady declared her-

self delighted with the opportunity of viewing anything so quaint and primitive as an open-air revival meeting, only begging her companions to stay, one or another, constantly by her, so that it would not appear to devolve upon any of the rustic community to draw near and cheer her solitude.

Gret gazed in surprise as the well-laden mill launch nosed its way among the row of boats, and then she laughed as Bobbie began frantically to claw out tufts of the bank in his endeavors to effect a landing. She went up, took the line he threw to her, and made the boat fast to the near-by stump of a willow. Then the party climbed out with greater and less exhibitions of agility.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Baring, gazing about. "What do we sit down upon?"

"Mother Earth, I fancy," replied Ludlowe, looking about him with amused interest.

"Let 's go and sit on the bank by the table. I expect that 's where the old boy will hold forth," proposed Bobbie, his arms clasped tightly about a collection of rugs and wraps. And the proposal seeming good to the rest of the party, they repaired to the ledge of slightly rising ground near the cottage and the table previously chosen by Robin as apparently the best vantage point.

Here, some little time after they were all comfortably seated, came Gret and stood smilingly before them. "That is my sister, Eva," she remarked collectively to the whole group, with a glance at the girl a few feet away.

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Baring smiled graciously in that young lady's direction. "How do you do?"

Maude followed suit, and the men all lifted their hats and naturally looked with interest at the girl whom none had seen nearer than the bluff above the river. Eva felt and looked awkward and self-conscious, and devoutly

wished the earth would swallow her up, or that she had never come. And then Gret, immediately compassionate, coolly inserted her person between the distressed girl and the eyes of a too interested world, and remained standing so until the first excess of interest should have subsided.

"She 's very pretty," remarked Mrs. Baring in an undertone to Ludlowe, who reclined on her right. "But then, dear me, pretty girls are plentiful enough. She would n't be half the acquisition that Gret would be. She has n't an atom of her self-poise."

"Oh, no. She 's an exactly opposite being," agreed Ludlowe. "But she 's undeniably pretty; refined-looking, too."

When she had at last finished her ramble round among the assembled people, Gret came and took up her seat near Eva. She looked about with eyes wide and bright with contentment and appreciation. The air was growing delightfully cool and still; and the people, having mostly arrived, were seated about in groups, chattering and keeping a watchful eye on the long-coat-tailed figure of the preacher visible in earnest converse within the cottage; the river was turning to gold and the pines were sharpening against the sky, and Gret's heart swelled with delight.

Presently, just when expectation had reached the point when, neglected, it must decline into impatience, the much-expected one came forth, followed by the widow bearing a glass of water, from which from time to time the lips of eloquence would be moistened. He came and stood by the table, looking smilingly round on his audience.

Gret scanned him curiously, very curiously, for here was another of the same calling as Arthur. He was a small, lean man, the largest thing about him, it seemed to her, being the wide, shapeless mouth. His lips were devoid of hair, but from the very tip of his chin depended

a long scanty beard. His manner was unctuous and self-satisfied in the extreme, and Gret disliked him there and then and was prepared to scout every word he said before he had uttered one.

He began to talk very gently and blandly, smiling with the air of one who had great surprises in store for them, as doubtless he had in the way of sound and flurry. He was experienced in just such work and—barring, of course, such born skeptics as Gret and such cultured listeners as those from the mill-house—just such audiences as that in hand, and his opening preamble was a more or less egotistical string of reminiscences and worn anecdotes. Then, as the rich August evening mellowed and waned, he warmed to his work. From the delights of travel and a world-wide reputation he had come—he—to tell them what they were doing; to show them how, leading their careless lives, amassing wealth, feasting and drinking, ploughing and reaping, they stood on the very verge of a precipice over which any day might hurl them. They lived so, not knowing each night they laid them down but that in the midst of their sleep they might be awakened by the awful trump of doom that should shake the earth to its foundations.

All this, and more, in very questionable grammar and with much repetition. Still, the audience was for the most part unable to criticize these points, and as there was certainly no faltering nor lack of conviction, they were on the whole impressed. The preacher paused, took a sip of water, and instructed the nearest boy, standing open-mouthed and hands in pocket, to touch a match to the bonfire—an order which was obeyed on the instant.

Then as the flames rose up the preacher spread his arms abroad and began the revival in earnest. His voice rose as the wind in winter, and so many and great were his writhings and contortions that it seemed to Gret that

he could not really be standing on the same spot all the time. He wailed and ranted and tore, and pictured in terrifying terms the endless death in the lake of brimstone awaiting those who did not avail themselves of the heaven he came to offer. And so great was the frenzy into which he worked himself that to Gret's surprise some of the women present became infected and began to weep hysterically. She looked round to see how others were taking it, and her eyes fell on Widow McCarty. The little widow was seated near the preacher, her hands folded in her lap, and on her face a look of bitter satisfaction so profound that Gret's eyes were arrested immediately. She rose up softly, and quietly crossing the slight intervening distance slipped down by the old woman's side.

"Is n't it nice to think of McCarty burning like that forever," she whispered.

Widow McCarty started and looked shocked. "I would n't wish anybody such a thing, child," she said.

Nevertheless, when Gret, with a slight smile, turned her attention to the speaker, the woman looked down into her lap with perturbed eyes. For down in her heart she knew it was just that thought—not exactly the burning, perhaps, but the thought of how he who had wronged her would be punished—that alone of all the religion preached had been gladdening her heart that night.

By and by Gret looked at the widow again, and noticed the dejection that had succeeded satisfaction. She smiled amusedly, though a sort of half-pitying comprehension crept into her eyes, as if for a moment she divined the feelings of the poor, rebellious embittered heart. Then she got up and went back to Eva and Robin, just as the preacher had begun to exhort those who were repentant to come and kneel at the mercy-seat—presumably somewhere near him—and wrestle with the devil while he prayed with them. And as Gret reseated herself she

saw the widow go and kneel sadly and uncomfortably at the chair upon which, when all was said and done, the man of God would sit.

"What do you bet," whispered Robin, "that Mike Westfeldt does n't go and kneel and get religion."

"What does it cost?" inquired Gret.

"Oh-h, nothing, I suppose—anything you like to put in the collection."

"Oh, perhaps he will, then," said Gret smiling. "They won't do a thing to him in camp to-morrow if he does."

And perhaps this same conviction was borne in upon Mike, because, though plainly very interested in the proceedings, he yet remained among the unrepentant. One other woman joined the widow at the mercy-seat, and over these two the preacher prayed loud and long, finally dismissing them to go back among the wolves and set a bright and shining example—a concluding sentence which Gret thought sounded distinctly spiteful. Then, concluding that the laborer was worthy of his hire, and asking some one to pass the hat round, the revivalist sat down and rested from his labors.

Gret noticed that as soon as the hat appeared, borne round by the widow, there was a general desire to see to the boats and an immediate necessity to start for home. However, most of the camp hands contributed a nickel, and the mill-house people—perhaps grateful for the novelty, if nothing else, of the entertainment—gave liberally, so that the preacher's strenuous efforts did not go altogether unrewarded.

As soon as the obnoxious hat had returned to its source, the people closed back again, chattering with much energy. Among others, Jake strolled up to the two girls and Robin.

"Well, how was that for a spiel?" he asked, his eyes wandering curiously over Eva as she stood by Robin.

"Fine!" laughed Gret. "But I was hoping to see you go up and repent."

"Not much in my line," said the truthful Jake; "unless I'm found out."

"That 's about right, too," observed Dick Swinton, who had approached in time to catch this expression of sentiment.

"But I 'll tell you what I was thinking," went on Jake, looking knowingly at Gret, and then glancing up the cañon behind them, upon whose sides, despite the deep shadows, the smooth outlines of second growth could be plainly traced: "I was thinking that perhaps you might go up and repent yourself!"

Robin burst into a loud guffaw. "You bet—the fire!" he said, quick to catch Jake's meaning. Dick, too, laughed in remembrance; and Gret, rendered indifferent by the lapse of time, laughed herself.

Here the mill-house party, about to embark, came up to speak a parting word.

"You must bring your sister down to see us, Gret," said Mrs. Baring gushingly. "You so rarely go out, do you?" to Eva. "Are n't you ever lonely?"

"Oh, no!" replied the girl quietly.

"No. She reads all day, like mother," explained Gret.

"Dear me! A real book-worm. Well, come and see us even so," said Mrs. Baring, smiling and turning away. "A few studies in real life are to be recommended occasionally."

Here Bobbie, who had stared at Eva with unblinking ardor for a moment or so, having finally arrived at the conclusion that she was very pretty, but too quiet, broke in: "We came down in the launch. Come along; we 'll take you home."

"Oh, yes. How thoughtless of me!" exclaimed Mrs. Baring, pausing. "Of course we can take you home."

But Gret feeling a gentle kick on her ankle from behind, and knowing it came from Robin, who was not pleased with the proposition, declined with thanks.

"We like the row home by starlight," she said. "Robin brought us down, and he will take us back all right. Thank you, though."

So with cheerful good-nights the mill party embarked, and Robin and his two charges prepared to follow their example.

"Say!" called out Jake, ambling over the uneven ground. "Our party 's kind of growed some way or other since we came down. We can't all get in the boats. You three don't fill that. Can't you give some of us a lift?"

"Yes, of course," acquiesced Gret. "Come on, Dick," waving her arm; "and Oly."

That amiable youth accepted the invitation immediately, coming over the bunchy grass in a series of long hops. "I 'll help row, Rob."

"All right," said Robin a trifle sulkily. And Gret, whose quick ear the tone caught, glanced quickly at him and saw at once that for some reason or other he did not care for the addition to the boat party. However, that was a matter of absolutely no moment, and she did not even trouble to decide why he should be thus displeased.

Eva sat in the stern, and Dick, being the heaviest man present sat by her side. On the footboard, with her back against Dick's knee, Gret planted herself, and facing them sat Robin rowing. Behind him rowed Oly, and behind him again in the bows, a plank held firmly under his arm by way of a rudder, sat Jake. So the heavily laden boat started homeward up-stream.

Eva enjoyed the row home, her shyness dispelled by the half darkness. She was essentially the child of dreams and shadows; and as she sat, with her back to the faint

light of the horizon, her oval face with its natural pallor, and the big, soft eyes with that faint, attractive droop of the white lids, looked very spirituelle and sweet. Gret shared with Eva the naturally pale, creamy skin, only that in her case perpetual tan effectually disguised the original delicacy of coloring. Not so with Eva, who never ventured into the sun until it was well down on the horizon.

Robin sat rowing with the ease of great strength and long use, his eyes taking in the previously unnoticed points of beauty in Eva Silway, the slim, pointed white hands folded languidly in her lap, and the soft, creamy throat.

There is always a time when a man first sees a woman, even if he has known her all his life. And Robin looked at Eva Silway for the first time that night.

Notwithstanding that two of the boat's crew were silent—the one naturally, and the other on account of much thinking—there was no dearth of noise or excitement on board. Oly did his best to run into every boat they passed or that passed them, treated the luckless Jake behind him to copious showers, and then quarreled vociferously with that justly incensed gentleman. Gret delighted with the whole affair, sat on the floor and chuckled and giggled all the way home, watching betweenwhiles, with keen, unconscious love, the water, oily in its smoothness, and with a sort of sullen light in its depths, move in heavy swells from the boat's side.

No stop was made at the camp-landing. The boat was sent straight on to the Silway steps; and here Robin jumped out and helped Eva to alight with almost exaggerated deference. For this service, as may be expected, he was duly taken to task as they rowed on up to the Orchards.

"Never knew you was so smart around ladies," observed Jake maliciously.

"Me neither!" snorted Oly. "Bowed plumb down to the ground!"

"Shut up," said Robin tartly.

"She 's a mighty pretty girl," remarked Oly blandly.

"Yes. She 's got the looks, and Gret 's got the brains," said Jake, summing up.

"Oh, I don't see that Gret 's so extra clever!" said Robin.

"You don't!" echoed Jake, astonished at such heresy.

"Well, you will if you ever fall out with her, sonny!"

CHAPTER XV

A GREAT SURPRISE

LUDLOWE'S actions were always more or less of a surprise, even to his intimates. The deliberations which preceded his actions were rarely expressed; consequently there was little to guide expectation. But if one person could be said to know more than another of his intentions, present and future, it was Arthur Massinger, who was certainly favored with more of Errol's plans and ideas than any one else; and yet even he was sometimes as much taken aback as the rest of the world.

One day, towards the end of August, Ludlowe came and seated himself near his friend, as that gentle individual lay reading in his favorite spot near the cool of the river brink, and opened up, in as casual a way as he might have discussed plans for the morrow, a conversation that, for the time being, at all events, astounded Arthur as much as anything his erratic friend had ever said or done in his life.

"In the midst of that anxiety for Gret's peace of mind which you once mentioned, Arthur, did it ever occur to you to think of her as a possible wife for me?"

Arthur's amazed countenance was a sufficiently decided answer in the negative, and Ludlowe laughed.

"It did n't, I see. Well, I can quite understand that at first glance the idea is astounding." He lay back on the moss and, clasping his fingers behind his head, watched

his friend from between lazily drooping lashes. "First of all, though, what objection first shot into your mind when I spoke?"

"None!" Arthur shook his head in a manner intimating his total inability to grasp the subject in hand. "Nothing so definite. I simply can't imagine—" He gazed hard at his companion, and shook his head again. "Well, not without time to recover. You came to the idea gradually yourself, no doubt. As you say, upon consideration it may not be so amazing. Just at first glance it is—" Once more he shook his head. "I never tried to—"

"Well, spend a few minutes in stern imagining," advised Errol, smiling. "Then kindly avail yourself of my formal invitation to express an opinion."

Arthur glanced at the river, and then back at his friend. Apparently it was not easy to imagine to order. "She is the last person on earth I should have dreamt of—I mean for you. She is so inexperienced, so—well, not exactly crude or rough, but—why, it would take a trained woman of the world to fill the position of your wife, Errol."

"I don't know about that. I am not at all partial to the species," objected Errol with a slight shake of the head. "I have been watching Gret pretty closely, and unless I'm mistaken she is a girl who would be no time at all grasping a new situation, and becoming mistress of it, too."

"Oh, yes." Arthur smiled, a faintly troubled smile, it would almost seem. "Yes, I believe that. But,—” he shook his head hopelessly—"I can't imagine Gret leading your life."

"What is my life?" inquired Ludlowe, amused.

"Well, I meant more particularly the life that as your wife she would have to lead," explained Arthur; "that of a prominent society woman. You see, when you marry you will have to formally open up your establishment, and entertain, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, I don't know," obviously unimpressed. "I don't feel bound in any such manner. I suppose gradually some such procedure would have to develop." He turned to his friend with sudden curiosity. "But you must have imagined some sort of a future for me, Arthur, or this idea of mine would n't run so evidently counter to pre-conceived ideas of your own."

"Oh, yes; I had, of course," confessed Arthur readily. "I've always supposed that, when the necessity for marriage could be no longer put off, you'd go home and marry whichever of the young society women over there appealed to you as the most suitable and congenial."

"Just what I would n't do!" declared Ludlowe emphatically. "Such a life would be lifelong bondage, and I can arrange to perpetuate my race at less cost. I am weary heart and soul of society women. Their minds are as fast bound and inexpansive as the four walls of that building."

"But where there is no love present—and love, I notice, is never mentioned as a possible factor to marriage—a conventionally reared woman makes the safest wife," observed Arthur.

"She does," agreed Ludlowe easily. "That is just why I am not married to-day. I can't find a woman who could be depended upon to recognize convention when necessary, but who, when away from that necessity, could be herself and had a self to be."

"And do you think Gret answers that description?" queried Arthur.

"I think Gret is a woman who will always be guided by reason," replied Ludlowe. "Conventionality I could teach her."

"And does n't it matter at all whether the woman you make your wife is one you could love or not?" asked Arthur softly.

"Why, it certainly does matter whether or not we could be congenial," responded Errol evasively. "And, as I said, that has been one of my main stumbling blocks. Now, I can't imagine Gret ever disgusting me. She could never become an intriguing society woman. Her mind could n't be brought down to that gage. It has been shaped amid too much bigness," and he motioned toward the hills that circled them.

"Yes," Arthur nodded, "and I'm afraid if she stuck to her post her heart would break."

"I would be gentle with her," smiled Ludlowe. "She should have her seasons of freedom every year, until the chains had worn easy, at all events. And to begin with I would have the yacht over and take her on what the society papers call an 'extended cruise.'"

"You would joke if you were going to be executed, I do believe," complained Arthur.

"What an unfortunate simile!" laughed Ludlowe, his eyes, serenely contemplative, on the rippling brightness of the waters.

"Don't you ever expect to love?" queried Arthur wistfully then. "Are n't you afraid that some day, when you are committed irrevocably to some other woman, you will come across the one you are to love?"

"I expect eventually to love the woman who becomes my wife and the mother of my children," replied Ludlowe coolly. "No one else."

"Every man loves at least once," said Arthur gravely; "and it is n't always his wife and the mother of his children either. But if your love dream is safely over and done with, then all may be well."

Ludlowe smiled, just a mere faint curving of the lips; and Arthur watched him with that faintly puzzled tenderness so often in his eyes when regarding his friend. He would fain believe that in the chambers of that heart

so deeply hidden from passing notice there stood a grave of evergreen beauty, whose presence perpetually precluded the entrance of another guest. But it was only hope or conjecture, or both. After a little while he took up the temporarily abandoned discussion.

"And so you think you could love Gret, as your wife and the mother of your children?"

"Yes; I think she is a girl one might become very attached to." Ludlowe waked from his short reverie and took up his former theme willingly enough. "Moreover—and this is one of the main considerations, Arthur—she will be the mother of fine children. She is lion-hearted, and I don't believe her children could be commonplace. And then she is a woman of splendid vitality; she will bring vigorous blood into my family instead of the sluggish stuff emanating from the veins of an effete and more or less degenerate aristocracy."

"Yes, that is all very true," admitted Arthur in a tone that implied many reservations.

"Still, you can't feel happy about it?" queried Ludlowe, amused.

Arthur smiled deprecatingly. "It is a great risk. And I'm fond of you both."

"And upon whose side, pray, are your anxieties most deeply enlisted?" queried Ludlowe further.

"Upon Gret's," confessed Arthur readily. "You are a hardened old sinner, and can recover from anything. Besides, a man does n't risk so much upon marriage; a woman generally adventures her all—her all in the way of happiness, at all events."

"I don't think Gret will be any more of a rash plunger in that respect than I myself," declared Ludlowe, the amused smile still on his lips. "Moreover, I do protest, my friend, that I mean no harm to the maiden, notwithstanding that you seem to regard her heart as

a blank page upon which I shall inscribe for weal or woe."

Arthur laughed, and once more shook his head, refusing maybe the challenge to further combat, or perhaps the cynical comfort proffered.

"Then," said Ludlowe, with an air of dismissing the subject, "after having discussed with engaging egotism my side of the question, we will postpone it indefinitely, recollecting as a casual consideration that, after all, the real issue of things lies entirely in Gret's own hands."

"No; I think it lies mostly in yours," said Arthur.

"You mean on account of my position, and all that?" queried Ludlowe sharply. "Because I don't believe that would weigh a particle with Gret if she did n't happen to like the proposition otherwise."

"I don't either," agreed Arthur decidedly. In spite of an inquiring glance from Errol, he refrained from giving the real reason for the opinion expressed, but went on, always with the faint, troubled wistfulness of manner: "So you have n't approached Gret herself in the matter at all yet?"

"Oh no; nor shall I for some time to come. I intend to have aunt take her back to San Francisco on a more or less lengthy visit. Then I can judge how she seems inclined to take to civilized life."

Arthur laughed in spite of himself. "I should just like to see Mrs. Baring's face when you mention your wishes, Errol. I suppose you 'll drop it on her like a bolt from the blue, as you did me." And Ludlowe laughed too.

Arthur silently passed on to a consideration of the problem so lately presented to him, a problem of which the future alone could show the gradual unfolding and the answer. Somehow he did not doubt for a moment but that when Errol held out his hand Gret would unflinching place hers within it. He was the master intellect

of them all, and to him long ago Gret had quietly sworn allegiance. So Arthur had divined, with a divination born of affection for them both.

When Ludlowe felt inclined to divulge his somewhat loosely molded plans to his aunt, he was not in the least disappointed at the effect. That good lady was at first plainly paralyzed beyond speech, and Ludlowe sat and watched her face in open appreciation of its many and rapid changes.

At the opening of it Mrs. Baring received her nephew's communication in silence—for two reasons: in the first place, she was too aghast, too utterly dumbfounded, to even gasp her dismay; and in the second place, because, when she had regained composure sufficiently to enter a protest, she was equally able to realize the futility of it. And then she cast rapidly, almost frantically, about in an attempt to discover where she herself stood in the matter. One of her first thoughts was of Maude, and this prompted her first question.

"Does Gret—is this—this known?"

"No," promptly; "and I don't intend it to be for a time. You can arrange matters precisely how you like, aunt—tell any yarn you please—as long as you oblige me by bringing about the visit I have mentioned and keeping the whole thing strictly to yourself."

Mrs. Baring's lips closed on further questions for a few moments. She felt like a prisoner given brief respite. Maude need not know for a time, then, and in the meantime she could think things over and devise a plan whereby suspicion might be averted until almost the final moment. Ultimately, of course, she would lose her—Maude. But then that was only a matter of time in any case. And whatever happened, one thing was quite clear to Mrs. Baring: if Gret was to enter society as any such personage as Errol's wife, she wanted to be chief factor

and sponsor. She did not flatter herself that Gret was a very dirigible quantity, but, keen as the girl evidently was, she would still be a total stranger to the kind of life her new position would call for, and would surely need advice of some kind, sometimes. Just for one fleeting second Mrs. Baring considered the possibility of so manipulating Gret's ignorance as finally to disgust Errol, and cause him to abandon as impractical this wild idea of his; but she dismissed the thought even in the forming. Errol was too sharp, and Gret herself could not be fooled very long. No; Mrs. Baring felt that any insincerity on her part toward Gret's interests would surely be discovered and visited on her head with vengeance in time to come, and that the best possible thing for her to do would be to strive to make herself indispensable to the coming mistress of Ketton.

All these things passed very swiftly through Mrs. Baring's mind, and then she sat and gazed at her nephew. Apparently she was sadly wondering why such men were created for the confounding of rightly ambitious relatives. Gret of all women under the sun! Though, of course, there was no telling at all how she might turn out.

"She might become quite a celebrity," she observed, speaking her thoughts aloud. "She is so odd, you know."

"I don't doubt at all but that she will," responded her nephew coolly. "She is not the woman to stay in the background anywhere. It won't take her long to feel her way and get accustomed to the somewhat problematical ways of society in our fair city, and then if she does n't sit down hard on some of those who fancy they are running affairs there, I am greatly mistaken."

"I would n't be at all surprised, either," agreed Mrs. Baring, smiling at so pleasant a prospect. "I believe she is quite equal to it."

"Oh, yes. She is equal to anything." Ludlowe's head lay back in the chair, and he watched his aunt from between half-closed lashes. "I think you 'll find she will cope very successfully with all that arrives in the way of circumstance, both friend and foe."

Mrs. Baring nodded, and sat in almost resentful silence for a moment or so. "I thought," she said then, "that Gret—that Arthur—well, everybody thought that—"

"Very good! Let them go on thinking so," advised Ludlowe.

Mrs. Baring intended to, but did not say so. "Well! If I 'm to have her down in San Francisco with me, I must get her here more and break her in somewhat."

"Oh, she 's not so great a savage as you seem to suppose," said Ludlowe. "The mother is a very refined woman, I am told."

"Yes, so Bobbie says," with faint scorn. "But I imagine she is very peculiar."

Ludlowe's eyes rested on his aunt's face in ill-concealed amusement. He knew that in Mrs. Baring's eyes the chief proof of Mrs. Silway's peculiarity lay in the fact that she had all the summer been able to deny herself the privilege of calling on her fashionable and newly imported neighbors. Mrs. Baring had begun life on the Wishkah by devoutly hoping she would not have a lot of uncouth calls inflicted on her. As there was absolutely no other woman in that region at all likely, or in any position, to call except Mrs. Silway, her hopes and fears were obviously limited in range. When, however, time passed and Mrs. Silway showed not the slightest disposition to either call or in any other way obtain a sight of her new neighbors, Mrs. Baring began to be aggrieved. Finally she came to long for commune with a woman somewhat her own age, only to have the longing remain unappeased. Now, without any loss of dignity, she would have a valid

excuse for storming the stronghold of indifference; and Mrs. Silway should be shown a distinguished woman of the world, whether or no. For of course it would be necessary to call and obtain that lady's permission to take Gret back to San Francisco with her.

"I shall have to call and see Mrs. Silway about it—Gret—of course," she observed, shaping her thoughts aloud.

"You will, eventually," agreed Errol; "but let me remind you, in closing the subject, that Gret herself is in ignorance of any ulterior motive either on your part or mine. I want her to remain so until I myself enlighten her." And Mrs. Baring, somewhat offended, nodded assent. The matter was closed for the time being.

But from this it came to pass that, with all extraneous motives hidden, and with that wholesale graciousness characteristic of her when she chose, Mrs. Baring began to cultivate Gret's friendship and confidence. And Gret, also with hidden motives, allowed herself to be cultivated. There was ample time for both processes, as Mrs. Baring did not intend to return to San Francisco until the middle or end of September, or even, should the weather remain good, until perhaps the middle of October. That was about the time when people began to return to the Bay City, for one thing; and for another, now that she was fairly reconciled to her present mode of living, Mrs. Baring wished to remain as long as possible at the mill. For when she and her party departed for town Bobbie accompanied them. That was definitely settled between him and Bertie Fonseker. After some discussion the two young men had arrived at the conclusion that one of them at a time was quite sufficient to manage the business, and they had arranged each to spend half the winter in the city, Bertie generously allowing Bobbie to spend the first half. The one in the city, however, was to send up, from time to time, guests for the duck-shooting, which during the rainy

season was plentiful on the Wishkah, so that the solitary resident at the mill would not become afflicted with melancholia.

For the rest, the mill had now resolved itself into a smooth and settled affair. It had its regular customers; and, moreover, thanks to Gret and her influence, both owners had managed to obtain a fair insight into what a concern of its size ought to do, and not only that, but what it must do, in order to make it pay. Business had been good and brisk all the summer, but when the rain set in all down the coast, in October or November, and building to any extent ceased, Mrs. Baring surmised that orders would doubtless fall off both in number and magnitude. Obviously, then—and if possible not till then—was the time to take the restless Bobbie away from a business that Mrs. Baring still fondly imagined he more than half controlled.

Notwithstanding that she still had a month or so at her disposal, Mrs. Baring considered it none too early to begin to take soundings in the mysterious ocean of Gret's personality. As she observed to Ludlowe, she was averse to taking charge of so decided a quantity while yet unknown. Gret on the other hand, had no desire at all to learn more of Mrs. Baring's personality, being probably of the opinion that it was not of a kind to repay research; but for reasons of her own she had decided to part with that lady on terms as nearly approaching familiarity and friendship as possible. Though for Mrs. Baring to make a sudden change of front was the easiest thing in the world, to Gret it was one of the most difficult. In her heart she never did change her opinions, or at all events but rarely; but sometimes it suited her to bury them away.

However, the first bread broken in Mrs. Baring's house was the rubicon which, safely passed, ended most of the difficulty. And the task of prevailing upon Gret to pass it

was accomplished one afternoon when the mill-house party returned from a trip to Quellish in the launch.

"We 've just twenty minutes to dress," observed Mrs. Baring, consulting her watch. "Come in to dinner with us, Gret."

"Thank you, but I don't think I will," replied Gret in her usual way. "I believe I 'd better go home."

"Why?" demanded Ludlowe, recognizing his aunt's motive. "You 'll refuse us, and then go right up to the camp and dine with all that rabble. You know you will."

"We have n't any rabble in our camp," retorted Gret quickly. "Dick won't have any."

"Well, I mean—you know what I mean!" said Ludlowe, still busy with his task of gathering up wraps and unaware of the extent of his offense.

"He means old and young, those you know and those you don't know," explained Massinger, smiling.

"Yes, that had just *better* be all he means!" chuckled Bobbie. "Rabble, indeed! The idea—Gret's camp rabble!"

Ludlowe looked up, realizing for the first time the effect of his words. He laughed. "Why, I meant it in the way of assortment, Gret," he said; "not reflecting at all upon the individual worth and qualities of the members."

"Well, as long as you don't quarrel over it—" observed Mrs. Baring, turning to go up the bank; "remember, I commission you three to bring Gret in to dinner, some way or other."

"We will," replied Bobbie cheerfully. "Give me some of those bundles, Arthur. Man alive! You 'll bury yourself. Come along, Gret!" holding out a disengaged hand.

But still Gret hesitated. She glanced at the cotton waist, once blue, but the cuffs and front of which, having claimed Lizzie's most vigorous attention, were now almost white; and at the long, thin, brown hands, and for

perhaps the first time in her life was troubled over personal appearance.

"Oh, pooh!" said Bobbie, divining the cause of her hesitation. "You're the finest old lady on the coast. Come along!"

And so Gret went up to the house, where she was taken in hand by Maude. That entirely unsuspecting lady, having from the very first conceived a liking for Gret, and not for a moment deeming her dangerous to personal interests, had noticed with amusement Mrs. Baring's hospitable overtures and stood in readiness to back them up. She took Gret with her to her room to prepare for the evening meal; and here Gret proceeded to wash her hands, and was about to follow that performance by washing her face, when stopped by a little shriek from Maude.

"No, no! Oh, dear me, never wash your face after having been out of doors so long. Here! Refresh your face with this."

"This" was a delicate preparation of glycerin, rose-water, cucumber, and such emollients, and Gret looked at it doubtfully. However, she applied it dutifully to the smooth, brown skin of her face; and then underwent the novel sensation of having her waist pulled down at the back and loosened gracefully in front, and of having her hair, plentiful, but heavy and straight, pulled loosely over her forehead and coiled in loose and pretty fashion at the back of what Maude discovered to be a small, well-shaped head. All this done, Maude surveyed her handiwork. She longed to complete the work by winding a dainty ribbon round the girl's neck, but something, some dignity which she felt might be on edge just now, prevented her. However, even so, she was very satisfied with her work and the change even such slight improvements effected in her charge.

At the table Gret was treated as if she had sat there a hundred times before, and, of course, not the least apparent notice was taken of her actions. Nevertheless, she knew very well that nothing she did or left undone would go unobserved. Any discomfort or embarrassment caused by this knowledge, however, was only manifest in a greater deliberation of manner than usual. Mrs. Silway had always insisted on strictly conventional behavior at table, so that Gret had little to fear from irregularities of this kind; still the fare she was accustomed to was very simple, and there were several dishes on the mill-house table to the manipulation of which she was a stranger. But Gret was wary; she took nothing that she had not previously been able to notice the others handle. Altogether she made few mistakes, and her lack of ease was veiled beneath stolidity. She was cool and shrewd, two very essential attributes in dealing with the unknown.

Mrs. Baring expressed herself afterward to Ludlowe as very well satisfied, all things considered.

"She is very smart," she declared impressively. "She 'll never have to see a thing but once. And I really think that with a little decent dressing she can be made to look quite handsome."

"I don't know about that," replied Ludlowe judicially. "She never will be pretty, but she 'll always have a sort of distinction that to my mind is worth more than looks."

"Oh, certainly, I agree with you," assented Mrs. Baring with emphasis. "That 's what I value about her so much—that something striking, I don't exactly know what."

"Poise," decided Ludlowe promptly; "nothing but poise—perfect poise of mind and body."

"Perhaps that is it," allowed Mrs. Baring. "I have great hopes of her; really I have." And Ludlowe smiled, perhaps merely in pleased assent.

Mrs. Baring took to breathing such sentiments to

Maude—with important reservations, as may be imagined. And then presently she confided in that lady her intention of taking Gret back to San Francisco with her. She felt herself somewhat indebted to Gret for valuable aid rendered Bobbie at a critical time in his business career, she explained, and Maude accepted the explanation with her usual indifferent gravity. Secretly she was a little astonished that Mrs. Baring should go to the length of having Gret visit her in her home, though she was able to fill out to her own entire satisfaction that lady's somewhat meager explanation of motive. Mrs. Baring had noticed—indeed, she had called Maude's attention to it more than once—the evident liking of Arthur and Gret for each other. Arthur was somewhat of a celebrity in his way, and Gret, were she ever to be his wife, would be more of one; socially it might pay to advance their interests.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PLANS OF MEN

AFTER having expressed his wishes to his aunt, and thus given, for the time being, at any rate, all necessary impetus to affairs, Ludlowe was content to sit back and calmly watch the course of events as they rolled along the path of his prescribing. In accounting to the public for actions to be taken, Ludlowe had given his aunt free rein, and it amused him to note with what diplomacy, according to that good lady's ideas, but duplicity according to Ludlowe's, she guided into convenient channels the thoughts and beliefs of her companions.

On the other hand, and also in secret, Gret, too, was amused. She allowed herself to be cultivated with a departure from her usual reserve that she sometimes feared was almost too sudden. Though sifted down to a fine point, Ludlowe's was about the only observing intelligence that she feared.

Her time was certainly very much occupied in the days that followed. She spent one way or another quite a portion of her time with the mill-house fraternity; and then she would not forsake her place at the camp counsels, nor neglect the call Eva had come to have on her evenings. No matter how tempting the project for the cool of the evening, the thought of the gentle, patient girl waiting on the bluff at home would send Gret speeding to her. Eva read and dreamed the day away very contentedly; it was entirely the life of her choice. But when evening came

she watched for Gret; and that day greatly lacked something which was not rounded off by the twilight talk on the bluff.

Of late she had become greatly entranced with the work of a modern authoress of most quaintly fanciful turn. So taken was she with this lady's sentiments that she insisted each evening on reading certain portions of her works to Gret, and each evening Gret amiably strove to get into touch with a mind the exact opposite of her own, failing on the whole, it must be admitted; for Gret had no more imagination than a bird. If she had had, she probably would not have possessed the power she had of dealing with actual events.

"I think that's such a nice idea—'Like a bird in a forest calling aloud if perchance somewhere its mate might hear,'" said Eva, closing the book over her fingers. "Don't you, Gret?"

Gret fidgeted on the sward in her endeavor to be sympathetic. "Well, what is it does that?"

"Why, one's heart." Eva laid her head back on the moss and gazed at the serene darkening blue of the sky. "You see, she believes all through that one's own will surely come to one; no need to go out and seek. I'm so glad of that."

"Humph! May be all right in books," said Gret the unbelieving.

Eva turned her head on the moss the better to look at her sister. "Well, if you go out and rush to and fro in life what do you get?"

"There's no telling," practically; "something, anyhow. If you don't get your own you can get somebody else's. Somebody," added Gret wickedly, "who is waiting at home for her own to come to her."

Eva laughed good-humoredly. "You bad old Gret!" she sighed. "No, but I see you don't catch the meaning

of the thing, the real meaning. If you did you 'd know you *could n't* take anybody else's."

"Well, anyhow," said Gret finally, "if one's own is bound to come to one it does n't matter where one is. Much less dull to be about doing things than sitting at home waiting."

"Perhaps," said Eva absently. Then with interest: "Have you ever been in love, Gret?"

"Don't know," with a laugh.

"Well, but—of course you know. Don't you love anybody?"

"Yes—you."

"Oh, well," impatiently; "but I mean a man!"

"How can one tell?" inquired Gret, scoffingly. "Can you?"

"Yes, of course I could," raising her head, the large, soft eyes opening wide for a moment. "It must be beautiful to love—really love. Would n't you think so, Gret?"

Gret thought for a moment, a sort of resentful curl on her lip. "No!" she said bluntly then. "I think it's only a kind of biting and rage deep down in one's heart all the time."

Eva listened unimpressed to this novel presentation of love. It did not concur with hers in the least. She herself was steeped in sentiment from head to foot. Naturally imaginative and sentimental, her life fostered these tendencies. Just now, like most young women of her kind with nothing particular to do, she was craving for romance, for a lover of her own, really her own, not read of in books and appropriated in imagination.

"Robin's going to read this book," she observed after a pause.

"Robin!" echoed Gret in amused surprise.

"Yes. He came up this afternoon when I was reading it," explained Eva. "He asked what kind of a book it

was, and when I told him he said he 'd like to read it and then he 'd come up and tell me what he thought of it."

"Oh, yes! He 'll take it home, look at the beginning and the end, and then bring it back and say he thinks it 's lovely!" laughed Gret.

"Oh, no; I don't think so," gently. "I should know if he did that. He said he 'd read it, and I think he will."

"Oh, he might; might take a streak of liking that sort of thing; get all wrapped up in it and want more," said Gret out of the infinity of her experience. "I expect he 's pretty dull just now, anyhow. What did he want—me?"

"He did n't say; but, of course, he did," answered Eva. "That 's what he always does come for."

"I wonder whether anything 's gone wrong," mused Gret. "I must go up one of these days and see how things are going on."

She was saved that trouble, however. The very next night Robin rowed down, tied his boat up, mounted the steps and seated himself near the two girls with an air of satisfaction.

"Hallo, Rob!" said Gret cordially. "Anything gone wrong?"

"No, nothing in particular."

"All wrong, I suppose," observed Gret.

"Yes; awful job living up there with those two, I can tell you," said Robin wearily.

Gret smiled, reflecting that he had managed to do it all his life so far. "Yes. Still, I expect it 's easier than working out for a living," she observed. "Is uncle any nicer to you yet?"

"Yes, a little; tells me what he wants done, and all that."

"Well, we never thought he 'd make up in a hurry," said Gret sagely; "he 's not that kind. But you' ll come

out all right if you keep on being careful. What does Widow Bennett think of it?"

"I don't think she knows what to think," replied Robin with a slight laugh and the air of one taking but little interest in the subject.

"Has she ever asked you anything?" queried Gret.

"Yes; asked me once or twice whether I'd given up the idea of going to Portland."

"Not when uncle was by?"

"No."

"Ah!" said Gret exultingly. "And what did you say?"

"Said I was waiting for Cecil to get me in."

"Think she believed it?"

"Oh, yes."

"That 's right," approvingly, and smiling at the widow's helpless credulity. "And so you 're just dull, and come to talk for a while, h'm?"

"Yes," responded Robin with a very taking assumption of wistfulness. "You don't mind, do you?" The question was addressed to both of them.

Eva smiled in her languid but altogether sweet way. "No, indeed!"

And Gret, her keen ear catching a peculiar note somewhere, glanced sharply at him and answered in her brusque fashion, "Of course not. What do you want to ask a crazy question like that for?"

However, from that point on conversation seemed to languish, try how they might to revive it. And it was not until almost time for Robin to start home that it really began to flow freely as of old. Gret was greatly puzzled, and could not tell at all what the change was that had come over some one or something. However, Robin took the promised book, and agreed to come down again on the second night and render his verdict on the much discussed work.

"Robin's getting—I don't know what," observed Gret, frowning on the receding boat. "He never did have much sense, but he used to be jolly. Now he is n't even that."

"Why, I think he's nice," said Eva stoutly. "Grown so big, too. Seems to have grown into a man all of a sudden."

"Oh, he's as big as he ever will be, of course," answered Gret, not so greatly impressed; "but it's growing the mustache that makes him look a man so suddenly. Then, of course,—I suppose he is a man."

Eva nodded thoughtfully, and Gret was quiet for a few minutes. Then she said reflectively: "Dull! How funny he should get dull suddenly like that. He's got as much company now as he ever had. It's not that. He's got something on his mind."

"Oh, I don't know, Gret. You used to be a great companion of his, but since the mill people came you dropped him altogether," said Eva in gentle reproach.

Gret opened her eyes at this view of matters. Then she laughed in sheer amusement. "I dropped him before that," she said truthfully enough.

However, when two nights later Robin appeared, as appointed, conversation ran smoothly enough, having for excellent start the book under discussion. Robin sided entirely with Eva's views of the question, and Gret fought them both with great display of scorn and much real amusement. The evening passed genially and quickly, and the faint instinctive feeling of uneasiness in Gret's mind wore off. After that she apparently thought nothing of it when, as was often the case, Robin joined the literary conclave on the bluff.

Toward the end of August Mrs. Baring broached the subject of the visit to Gret.

"How would you like to come back with us and spend

a month or so in San Francisco?" she inquired in a casual way one afternoon.

Gret's eyes opened. Such an invitation was genuinely unexpected and unforeseen, and she was amazed at her own good fortune and at the happy way in which circumstances seemed about to fit in with her plans. For Gret had made up her mind by some means or other to visit San Francisco herself that winter, and had intended pressing Mrs. Baring into service as chaperone. As far as money went she would have been able to carry out her designs, for though she had long ago ceased to accept anything from the mill profits, recognizing that the time had gone by when her advice or help was of any vital importance, yet she still had lying safely in the little bank at Quellish most of the money earned in the days of the early struggles. She had often been tempted in many ways to spend it, but had each time resisted temptation, it being borne in upon her that some day her desires and her financial ability, if represented by her father, would clash sadly. In the San Francisco project she had expected many difficulties to overcome, and was delighted with the new turn in affairs.

"I should very much," she responded unhesitatingly.

"Well, we must try and arrange it," went on Mrs. Baring suavely. "I must call and see Mrs. Silway about it. Do you imagine she will have any objections?"

"No, I don't think mother will," replied Gret. "I think she 'll be quite willing. Father's the one that will have something to say."

"Well, I must talk him over; that is, if I can see him," said Mrs. Baring. "But he never seems to be at home. Is your father a difficult man to get on with?"

"Difficult!" echoed Gret. She said no more, but the little laugh and curling lip added volumes. Then, suddenly reflecting that Mrs. Baring might, in the light of these

revelations, reconsider her idea of applying for the permission in question, she added quickly. "But you won't find him so. You 'll think him awfully nice!"

Mrs. Baring laughed and allowed the matter to drop. But that evening at dinner she expressed her opinions to the table at large.

"You know, I really imagine they 're virtually separated, but remain nominally together for the sake of the children."

But Bobbie and Bertie, on the strength of long intimacy with Gret, and Ludlowe by virtue of an intuitive mind and the ability to gather facts from trifles, scouted the idea.

"He 's a selfish bear, that 's all," declared Bobbie confidently. "And his family are so glad to have him away that they make no kick at the very small share of prosperity that comes their way."

Gret went home and informed her mother of the visit to be paid her some time in the near future, and also of its motive. Mrs. Silway was surprised.

"Why, I gathered from the way you talked that you did n't like this Mrs. Baring," she said, looking inquiringly across the table at the undisturbed Gret.

"I did n't."

"But you do now?"

Gret looked up at her mother with a smile so roguish that her face for the moment was absolutely winsome. "I 'd like to go to San Francisco!" she said demurely.

Mrs. Silway smiled too. "Well, I shall offer no objections. It would be a most wholesome change for you. Your father is the one to consider."

"I know," assented Gret. "That 's what I told Mrs. Baring—that I knew you 'd let me go, but that father would be the one to stand in the way, if any one did."

"You should n't display family matters too much before strangers," said Mrs. Silway quietly.

"I don't think I do—much," said Gret, after a moment's unbiased consideration of the matter; "but it's no good pretending father's good to us, and all that, when he is n't."

"Pretend nothing at all, merely leave the matter undiscussed," instructed Mrs. Silway. And then she went on reflectively, "Well, if she asks your father herself, in all probability he would not refuse her."

"Yes. I'll tell her all that," said Gret with a nod. "We mus' n't say anything about it to him ourselves."

"And you'll have to have a complete outfit, too," mused Mrs. Silway. "Well, if your father agrees to let you go, he'll have to see to that."

And so she dismissed the matter altogether from a mind trained most obediently to return to and remain at will in those calm regions of philosophy and study where the troublous waves of life never break in to disturb. But Gret and Eva discussed it far into the evening.

"Do you really like to go?" queried Eva, staring at her sister.

"Yes, of course. Would n't you?"

"No, indeed!" in a heartfelt way, "I'd hate to live with strangers and have to do all they did!"

"Why, I don't know that I will have to do all they do," said Gret, surprised at such a view of matters.

"Of course you will. You'll have to go out when they do and come in when they do, and go to bed and get up when they do, and, oh, you'll just have to wait till they do everything before you can do it," explained Eva. "Besides, fancy meeting strangers every day—fresh ones all the time!"

Gret laughed. "I sha'n't mind that. And then, if I don't like it I can always come home. But just think what I'll see—a big city, and how people live in it, and

—oh, you know, civilization altogether. Besides, I 'm not so scared of strangers as you are!”

“I 'm not scared of them. I just don't like them,” said Eva. “How long will you stay, Gret?”

“Oh, a month or so, I suppose. As long as she asks me to.”

“Well, I shall be awfully glad when you get back,” observed Eva somewhat disconsolately.

“I 'm not gone yet,” responded Gret tritely. “Don't let us say anything about it until I am really going. Be so silly if I did n't go after all.”

And this was agreed upon. Nevertheless, somehow or other, a rumor of her proposed visit crept about and reached the camp before long, its members, individually and collectively, being sincerely disgusted at the receipt of it. Hearing one day that it had got about and been discussed at the camp the evening before, Gret went to the camp the very next morning for breakfast and slid quietly into her seat by Dick. She had not to wait long for the expression of opinions she had come prepared to hear; she was immediately taken to task by at least half a dozen of the older hands, those who from long residence in the camp were very intimate, and taxed with a desire to enter the ranks of swelldom.

“Suppose,” said Oly scornfully, “when you come back there 'll be no getting near you.”

“Of course not,” agreed Gret, carefully refraining from anything that might be constrained into administering comfort. “I shall be able to see what a lot of hobos you really are.”

“How long will you stay, Gret?” inquired Dick. His head rested on his hand, and his eyes scanned the girl's face reflectively.

“About a month, I suppose.”

"Don't worry," put in Jake, holding converse, as usual, from the doorway. "She 'll be so tired of all that high-falutin' business in two weeks that she 'll come back quicker 'n she went."

"Well, anyhow, I expect I can get all the pie I want down there," observed Gret maliciously.

"Yes. And I can take a lay-off the while," retorted Jake.

"What 'll you do if your pa won't let you go?" inquired Cassidy, stepping quickly into the breach.

"Stay at home," replied Gret, smiling.

"Not if I know you," said Oly decisively.

Gret glanced at him, the faintest flicker of a smile rising and dying in her eyes. Then she glanced at Dick, whose steady blue eyes were still regarding her curiously, and ended her scrutiny with a survey of Jake's sage countenance framed in the doorway. And there was a slight softening of the wide, firm lips. These rough men, who all her life had been so good and gentle to her, had a more abiding place in Gret's heart than she knew.

In spite of assurances to the contrary from Bobbie and Bertie, both of whom had been once or twice in her presence, Mrs. Baring started for the Silway residence prepared to meet a downtrodden, resigned woman, who would probably be more or less embarrassed during her call. Needless to say, she was astonished at the reality. Margaret Silway saw her coming as she sat reading on the veranda, and closing her book rose to meet her, standing at the head of the steps until her guest approached. Her attitude was repose, her face serenity. The many ambitions, the little jealousies and little victories, the hopes and fears and worries and delights that go to make up the life of the average woman were mere names now to Margaret Silway. She was not embar-

rassed, or hampered by the consideration of what kind of an opinion her visitor was going to form of her and her surroundings, because it was a matter of not the faintest moment. Indeed, she never even thought of it. Still, in her rather cold way, she was very courteous.

"This must be Mrs. Baring, I know," she said with a welcoming smile. "In this locality it could not possibly be any one else."

"I suppose not," Mrs. Baring laughed—the little society laugh that of late had been very appropriately dropped. "How do you do, Mrs. Silway? Oh yes, I think it would be so much pleasanter to remain out here," in response to an inquiry from her hostess. "Dear me!" sinking into the seat drawn forward for her. "How very pleasant it is up here!" She gazed round upon the splendid panorama spread beneath her in surprise. "Why, I never would have believed the difference between this and the level of the river where we live. Dear me! It is pleasant; so cool, too. I don't wonder you never leave it."

"I am very attached to the spot," assented Mrs. Silway.

"Your younger daughter, too, quite takes after you in opinions evidently," commented Mrs. Baring, with a smile in the direction of Eva, who lay reading under the low-spreading boughs of her favorite tree, an enormous spruce.

"Yes—oh, yes, quite," agreed Mrs. Silway. "But the same can't be said for the elder one."

"No, indeed!" laughed Mrs. Baring. "The amount of energy daily expended by Gret in covering superficial area is positively alarming. Still, I am very much taken with her. I think with suitable opportunities she would carve a very marked future for herself."

"Yes, I think so myself," assented Mrs. Silway. "She has decided force of character."

"That is one of the things I wanted to see you about—

Gret, I mean" went on Mrs. Baring. "I want, if I can gain your consent, to take her back to San Francisco with me."

"It would be a nice change for her, and I should like her to have it," replied Mrs. Silway quietly. "But Mr. Silway, of course, might not agree."

"Oh, we must talk him over," confidently; "that is, if he should come down before I go."

"When do you think of returning to San Francisco, then, Mrs. Baring?" inquired Mrs. Silway.

"Oh not until about the end of September," replied that lady. "In fact, not until this nice weather gives out."

"Oh, well, then, he will undoubtedly be here before then," said Mrs. Silway. "I expect him home about the end of the month."

"Oh, then, I've no doubt we can arrange it," said Mrs. Baring confidently. "We would all like to have Gret with us. Though not understanding her at all at first, we have become so accustomed to her that she seems like one of the family."

Mrs. Silway smiled. "She is very uncompromising in her attitudes," she observed, her eyes resting on the bluff, on the top of which Robin Start had just appeared. He looked quickly round, noticed Eva in the shade of the tree, made a detour of the house and approached her. Apparently he made some request; and apparently, too, Eva demurred, for he threw himself on the sward and appeared to argue with her. Finally Eva rose, and again hesitated. She seemed to wish to approach her mother, but hesitated, Mrs. Silway judged, on account of Mrs. Baring's presence. Then Robin approached the veranda steps.

"Mrs. Silway, Eva is just coming with me to see a family of coon-kittens up the river."

Mrs. Silway nodded, smiling. "Very well."

The two went off, watched with more or less curiosity

by both women, who for the next half hour conversed together on such topics as could form neutral ground between their widely diverging personalities. Toward the end of the interview Mrs. Baring spent her conversational energies in adroit—or so she imagined—efforts at eliciting information concerning Mrs. Silway's family, career, etc., and went away well content with the fruits of her diplomatic probings, having, as a matter of fact, learned exactly as much as Mrs. Silway intended her to know and no more.

"I can quite see where Gret gets her self-possession," she told Maude afterward in relating to that lady particulars of the visit. "The mother is self-possession itself. Rather distinguished-looking, too, and was of excellent family. I find she is one of the Lederers of Baltimore."

"Oh, is she?" said Maude, who would have been just as much interested to learn that the absent woman was a member of any other family.

Meanwhile Mrs. Silway, left alone once more, mused a few moments on this creature from the old world that had just been with her. Then she stretched out her hand and took up her book again with a feeling of added contentment and serenity.

Gret came home for dinner, and as she reached the top of the bluff looked quickly round for Eva.

"Has Eva got a headache, mother?" she asked, coming and seating herself on one of the veranda steps.

"No; she went up the river with Robin to see some coon-kittens," replied Mrs. Silway.

"She did!" Gret's eyes opened as big as saucers. "Why, how did he ever get her to go? I never can get her to go out."

"I fancy she did protest," said her mother, smiling; "but you know how insistent Robin can be when he wants anything."

Gret nodded, still gazing widely at her mother. "Well," she said then, "I'm very glad. Eva is altogether too shy, and perhaps she'll get over that if she goes out a little more. It's so funny, though, for Robin to bother," she concluded, the puzzled expression coming back to her eyes.

"He probably wanted company on his expedition to see the kittens, and Eva was the only person available," hazarded her mother.

Gret nodded again. "Very likely. Whose kittens, Sam Davis'?"

"He merely said a man up the river," replied Mrs. Silway.

"Well, they must be pretty old kittens," observed Gret thoughtfully.

"Must they?" Mrs. Silway was consulting her watch. "I think Eva is going to be late for dinner. We have just ten minutes to wash, Gret."

Just as dinner was on the table Eva came hurrying in. The first pretty flush of sunburn was on her face, and her manner was shyly animated.

"Well," observed Gret, "you did manage to go out, did you?"

"Yes," replied Eva hurriedly, looking rather more embarrassed than the occasion seemed to call for. "I went up to see the baby-coons. Are n't they sweet? Have you seen them, Gret?"

"I've seen lots of them," answered Gret.

There was a pause, in which Gret seemed to wait for Eva to proceed with her experiences and Eva seemed to find nothing to say. Then Mrs. Silway unconsciously entered the gap with the remark to Gret that Mrs. Baring had been there that afternoon.

Eva's next venture abroad was a still more ambitious one. She went down to Quellish with Robin and Gret,

her only stipulation on starting being that she should not be required to meet strangers. Apparently she enjoyed the trip immensely, but she refused absolutely to go up into the camp or down to the mill-house; and when Gret rushed home one day with an invitation for her to make one of the party going to Quellish in the little launch, no persuasions on earth would induce her to accept.

As Robin began to spend quite a portion of his time on the bluff with Eva, on the river, or taking one or both girls out here and there, Gret thought it advisable one day to administer a warning.

"Don't forget, now, what you 're watching out for up there. You 've been getting along very well so far; but mind you don't spoil it all. Remember, you may go off watch for a time, but the Widow Bennett won't."

"I 'm not. I do all my work before I go out," replied Robin, looking sulky and injured instantly.

Gret gave her shoulders a queer little Frenchified shrug. "It 's nothing to me," she observed coolly. "How 's uncle getting along?"

"First rate," responded Robin, it must be admitted, very discontentedly. "Last week the heat seemed to make him very short of breath, but this week he 's been out and round the place again."

Gret nodded gravely. "Still you can never tell," she observed a trifle indefinitely. And then dropped the subject.

But old John Start contrived to get better and stronger; and then, just as people began to get accustomed to ranking him as an active member again, he died suddenly one evening, just when least expected.

It was late in the evening, and Gret and Eva, lying on the bluff, had just made up their minds to go to bed. The light of the day had waned into deep twilight, and the peculiar hush and stillness of sunset was over every-

thing, when round the bend of the river a boat was heard coming. Something peculiar in the rowing caught on Gret's ear; the oars wriggled noisily in the rowlocks and the stroke was uneven, now deep and now splashy like that of a person in most urgent hurry. Gret sat up and watched, her keen eyes frowning into the shadows.

"It 's Robin!" she exclaimed, long before Eva could make out if it were man or woman. "I 'm going down to see what 's the matter. I 'll bet his uncle 's worse." And she sprang up and dashed down the steps to the landing.

Robin saw her. In all probability he was looking for her to appear, for he rowed straight up to the landing.

"What 's the matter?" inquired Gret, before he had fairly reached her.

"Uncle 's dead!" he gasped. He had no hat on, and his eyes stared with excitement, mixed, perhaps, with a little fear and awe.

"Sure?" asked the ever practical Gret. "I mean, quite dead?"

"Yes, quite," jerked out Robin. "We were eating supper—fried clams we had—and all of a sudden uncle got up and then sat down again. And then he turned blue in the face and died."

Gret listened; and then to her own intense disgust and shame, was struck comically by Robin's odd way of recounting the case. The vein of irrepressible, and it almost seemed irresponsible, fun and glee in her nature asserted itself for a moment and she broke into a little bubble of laughter.

"What does it matter what color he turned, you stupid?" she said angrily then, endeavoring to cover her misdemeanor. "Go on down for a doctor—quick!"

"He 's dead, though," repeated Robin mechanically.

"Well, even so. You must get a doctor, or people will say that perhaps he might have been saved. Remember

there are those who will be ready to say you wanted the farm. Go on!" pointing down the river authoritatively.

And Robin picked up his oars and hurried on, while Gret went back to the bluff to tell Eva what had happened.

Eva stood gazing at her sister, her delicate face showing cameo-like in the misty light.

"And now Robin will have the farm, and be able to do just as he likes, won't he?" she said under her breath.

"Yes, of course," replied Gret, somewhat surprised at this reception of the news.

CHAPTER XVII

GRET GOES TO BE CIVILIZED

IN the middle of October the mill-house party reached Portland on their way to San Francisco. Gret was with them.

Mr. Silway had come down to Quellish toward the end of September, and a few days after his arrival had, in company with his wife, been invited to dinner at the mill. Mrs. Silway did not appear, pleading a headache, just as Mrs. Baring expected she would, and just as she herself would have done in like circumstances; but Mr. Silway arrived, unsuspecting and complacent.

When he had feasted and wined and was in excellent spirits, Mrs. Baring put forth her request; indeed, it was more of a demand, as she declared she absolutely would not take "no" for an answer. Mr. Silway was startled, but quickly summoned up an array of excuses and reasons for withholding consent, all of which Mrs. Baring, coached by Gret down to the minutest detail, still more quickly dispensed with, until there was nothing left to do but consent more or less willingly. So he consented, and went home to visit his wrath upon his wife.

"Seems you consented to let the girl go," he observed, with that peculiar dog-like twitch of the corners of his mouth characteristic of him when enraged.

"I certainly did—as far as my consent goes," replied Mrs. Silway calmly. "I think the change will be an excellent thing for her."

"Cost a pretty penny," declared Mr. Silway savagely.

"Oh, nothing more than you can well afford," said Mrs. Silway comfortingly.

"That 's what you say!" retorted Mr. Silway jerkily. "But you don't know what expenses I 've got to contend with, you see. Perhaps you don't know that I 've got to see a specialist this month."

"No, I did n't know it," looking up at him with amiable interest. "Why? Is tired nature giving way somewhere, then?"

"I don't know what tired nature is doing," with exasperation. "I know I don't like this pain I have in my side so often. But of course it 's no good coming to you for sympathy."

"Hardly," agreed Mrs. Silway with tantalizing calmness.

"Mr. Silway gasped with the effort to control himself, and finally, knowing that to remain in the room was to increase his exasperation almost beyond the limits of endurance, he left it with a bang. Mrs. Silway resumed her book with a smile. In the early days of her married life, when she had nervously done every conceivable thing to keep peace and avoid crossing her irritable and unreasonable spouse, she had never been able to stem for a moment the torrent of his petulance when aroused; but now that her eyes were long since opened and she knew him for what he was, now that in the utter calm of contempt and indifference she cared not whether he were pleased or vexed, the power to overcome him seemed to have been given her. Such was the contrariness of life.

Nothing further was said between them concerning Gret's proposed visit; but Mr. Silway questioned Gret herself very closely on the matter, being very little more enlightened after the cross-examination than before. So the matter dropped during the time of his stay in Quel-

lish. Just before returning to Portland, however, he arranged to meet the party on their arrival in Portland. And this he did.

Seeing that there was no getting out of it, Mr. Silway decided to carry his part through graciously. The party put up at the Hotel Portland, which was also his headquarters all the year round, or all of it spent in Portland, and on the evening of their arrival he entertained them all at dinner.

"This," said Mrs. Baring, glancing complacently round the elegantly appointed dining-room, "is a really fine hotel. This is your headquarters when away from home, Mr. Silway?"

"Oh, yes," glancing involuntarily at Gret as he spoke. "I have to be in some place central and well known commercially. You see, my dealings are with big lumber men, members of big commercial bodies, and so forth, and it is necessary for me to—to be among that class."

Gret was interestedly gazing down the long room with its delicately lovely tintings and had apparently taken no notice of his words. She had heard, though; and looking round the really sumptuous hotel, the like of which she had, of course, never even imagined, she contrasted it in her heart with the severely plain, almost humble, home that had been her mother's for the last eighteen years of her womanhood. Gret was old enough now to know, if not exactly what marriage was in all its intricacies, yet something of the equal partnership it ought to be. Her father had always been a pretty transparent book to her, but never had she realized the full extent of his selfishness as she did now. And nothing he could do for her now or in years to come would ever obliterate by a quarter of a shade the effect of that five minutes' thinking.

The rest of the party round the table were struck by the incongruity of the two scenes also, as who could help

being? And Walter Silway either divined as much or was afraid some such reflection might enter their minds.

"It 's unfortunate and disagreeable, though, having to be away from one's family so much," he said in a commendably casual tone. "But Mrs. Silway detests cities, and my business demands that I should be in them so much of my time. So there appears to be no way out of it."

"Does she, indeed?" said Mrs. Baring, not quite so successful in her tone of voice.

And here the conversation ended, much to Bobbie's relief who had been straining every nerve to look inordinately grave and to avoid meeting the eyes of any of the rest of the party.

The next three days were spent by the three women in shopping. Mrs. Baring had playfully demanded *carte blanche* from Mr. Silway in the way of fitting Gret out for her coming *début* into San Francisco society. She explained that nothing very costly or elaborate would be required for so young a woman, but that a deal of feminine experience was required in the choice of articles, which Mr. Silway could not be expected to have at his command, but which she would be delighted to bestow on the matter. And having nothing else to do, Mr. Silway acquiesced in all her proposals with the best grace possible. What was the use of pleading limited means, or even hinting at restrictions, in the face of the manner in which he evidently lived himself.

Mrs. Baring and Maude took a keen, and it must be admitted a somewhat malicious, delight in fitting Gret out with the most stylish and dainty, even if simple, articles to be found in the city and sending the bills in to her father. They visited nothing but the high-class establishments, and forgot nothing that Gret would be likely to

want on her visit. Mrs. Baring even took the precaution to add several dress-lengths of material to be made up as occasion required.

When arrayed in her new garments Gret certainly looked almost handsome and, as Ludlowe had predicted, very distinguished. Though secretly somewhat hampered by the unaccustomed sweep of skirts and restrictions of stylish cut, yet, since her slender figure called for garments of loose and graceful design, she managed to overcome her first feelings of discomfort and to preserve to all appearances her usual ease and poise. She would not have allowed herself to do anything short of this.

All unconsciously she amused her companions greatly by the calm almost stolid way in which she met scenes, experiences, and objects which were utterly new, and most of which must surely have been amazing to her. No startled gazing round, no exclamations of surprise or delight, rewarded those who had suddenly plunged her into the midst of civilization's wonders. Bobbie for one was somewhat disappointed.

"Are n't you ever going to be surprised?" he demanded at dinner the second evening.

"No; I came expecting to be surprised," replied Gret paradoxically. "You did n't suppose I thought I 'd find things pretty much the same as on the Wishkah, did you?"

"Oh, no! Still, I thought you 'd be a little bit surprised at some of the things," responded Bobbie in slightly injured tones. "I was surprised at you and the Wishkah when first I came down there."

"And so Bobbie evidently thinks you owe him a debt on that account which you have failed to pay," interposed Ludlowe, amused.

Every one laughed. And Massinger looked at Gret in the almost wistful, questioning way so often to be noticed

of late. "Gret's thoughts don't appear on her face," he said. "That's all."

On the evening of the fifth day the party started for San Francisco. The journey, which seemed tedious and uninteresting to her companions, was interesting and enjoyable in every particular to Gret, who could not see what Mrs. Baring could find to grumble at in the accommodations offered. But Mrs. Baring, who was now just resuming the status and personality for a time perforce laid by, entertained the idea that it did not become experienced travelers to be content, much less pleased, with anything provided for them while traveling. But to Gret every acre of the country was interesting to the last degree, as were also the various people who passed in and out on the road.

Arrived in San Francisco, the party broke up, Arthur going, with the promise of an early call, straight to his home, and Ludlowe, whose chauffeur and automobile were waiting for him, to his apartments in the St. Francis, while the remaining three entered the carriage waiting for them and drove off to Van Ness Avenue.

Gret was secretly delighted with the beautiful little establishment into which she accompanied her hostess, and secretly also very much surprised. She could not understand how a woman of such slight intellectual caliber, and such mercenary, almost sordid, ideas as she instinctively knew Mrs. Baring to be possessed of, could put together so artistic and delightful a home. And in this matter, of course, Gret was judging out of her depth. She did not take into account, and would not have been able to judge of the effect, if she had, of the years abroad, in cities that were the very home of art, that had molded Mrs. Baring's tastes, or rather given them to her, for she had none naturally.

The first week was spent by the ex-mill-house party in

various ways ; by Bobbie in a delighted visiting of clubs and routing out of old friends ; by Arthur in unbroken effort to gather up and establish again the work which he sadly discovered had fallen away to almost nothing ; and by the ladies in getting settled, shopping, and long consultations with modistes, milliners, etc. They took Gret with them everywhere, sometimes to that young lady's edification, and sometimes not. She was having a gown made up herself, which was interesting, of course. Mrs. Baring was having one of the lengths of silk so thoughtfully provided in Portland turned into a confection to be worn at the "at-home" about which Gret constantly heard so much. Otherwise Gret soon tired of standing and sitting about while Mrs. Baring and Maude matched this and prepared that. She decided that, after all, there was more in Eva's objections to having to do what they did when they did than she had at first believed, although, of course, the joys and the revelations of the visit were worth more than a thousand such small objections as this. Still, the objection was sustained, especially in the matter of getting up and lying down. Gret found herself becoming unreasonably sleepy hours before the establishment was ready to retire, or in the midst of whatever performance they happened to be attending ; and then again in the morning was awake long before even the servants were about. She tried going to sleep again, but the effect of this on the day following was so wretched that she tried it no more, but rose each morning, dressed, and slipping down to the big drawing-room overlooking Van Ness, sat in the oriel window and watched the people come and go. From this somewhat monotonous method of spending her mornings Ludlowe, who happened to overhear his aunt's chidings, rescued her.

"You know, Gret, you can't burn the candles at both ends," Mrs. Baring was saying impressively. "You are up at

nights several hours later, I've no doubt, than you are accustomed to being, so you must sleep later in the morning."

"But I can't!" protested Gret, opening wide those singular, bronze-colored eyes and staring at her hostess with comical earnestness. "If I do go to sleep again I feel sleepy and horrid all day after."

"She 's quite right, aunt," interposed Ludlowe, who was drinking tea *à la Russe* with becoming resignation. "It does serve any one that way who is not accustomed to sleeping late. I've found that out for myself."

"Well then, what do you do?" demanded his aunt. "Go to bed late and get up early? No woman is going to keep young long at that rate!"

"I get up as soon as I awake. No sooner, no later," replied Ludlowe, with a charming smile in the direction of his aunt. "I generally take a spin in the auto before breakfast. So get your hat ready to-morrow morning, Gret. I see we're partners in misfortune. I'll take you down to the Cliff to see the seals, and we'll leave these ladies to slumber as long as they like."

And so Gret's mornings, from being rather a trial, became her chief delight. The ocean appealed strongly to her, and her eyes widened as she gazed over it and drank in its free, salt breath. The seals, too, were a source of never-ending interest; and when in the early mornings they shot along the flat expanse of the Ingleside road like a sling out of a bow, Ludlowe, watching for the least signs of nervousness or fear, saw how her nostrils dilated with keen satisfaction.

"What is the 'at-home' that Mrs. Baring is going to have to-morrow?" she inquired one morning. "Seems to me a lot of people must be coming to it."

"There are," replied Ludlowe grimly. "Everybody that rejoices in the acquaintanceship of my esteemed aunt will—or should—be there."

"What for?" demanded Gret curiously.

"To see what new gowns she has, and how she is looking."

"No—do they?" looking at her companion in surprise. Then, noticing the quizzical curve of his lips, "No—what do they really come for?"

"That 's what they really do it for," replied Ludlowe. "What they are supposed to come for is to express their extreme satisfaction at seeing my aunt and Miss Vibart back in their midst once more."

"Oh, I see," nodded Gret. "I thought it was something like that."

"Yes. And if you watch Mrs. Baring closely to-morrow, Gret, you 'll obtain a valuable lesson," went on Ludlowe. "You 'll see how to be very gracious to the most important caller, a little—just a little—less so to the next in importance, and so on. Of course, it 's all so fine that you 'll have to watch very closely."

"I don't see any sense in that," said Gret. "If you 're glad to see them, you 're glad to see them, and that 's all there is about it."

"Not in society."

"Oh, well, of course, one can't like all alike ; some people are much nicer than others."

"Very much ; especially in their bank account," agreed Ludlowe.

"Is that all? Perhaps you 're mistaken," remarked Gret, making allowances for Ludlowe's unfailingly skeptical nature.

"Well, if I am, after being in the thick of the fight for fifteen years, I deserve a medal!" laughed Ludlowe.

"Oh, well, I don't care. I believe I shall see people I like and people I don't like," insisted Gret good-humoredly.

"You will. You 're not a hostess and a chaperon and a

mother of eligibles," returned Ludlowe, secure in the knowledge that part at all events of his meaning would escape Gret at this stage of her social growth.

And so, in consideration of the many preparations made for it, and the amount of discussion concerning it, and having in mind, too, Ludlowe's joking remarks as to the procedure observed during it—to say nothing of Bobbie's wholesale ridicule—Gret entered upon the first "at-home" of her experience with profound interest. She took up her station near Mrs. Baring, as carefully instructed by that lady beforehand, with great satisfaction and much inward anticipation. She was looking very distinguished in the gown made for her under Mrs. Baring's supervision—a *crêpe de chine* of a peculiar shade of fawn, that toned in a strange, taking way with the girl's greenish hazel eyes and dull-brown hair. But Gret, though duly interested while being arrayed for the affair, had long ago forgotten how she looked, in the interest of coming events; for she regarded the whole thing as a sort of entertainment, never pausing to realize that she herself was about to make her first bow to what would be a very curious world. And it was this view of the occasion, of course, that helped materially to give her attitude that perfection of ease, and her face and expression the amused and interested, but cool and unembarrassed, look which many remarked. But that generally was one of the main secrets of Gret's unfailing self-possession. She was always too greatly interested in all that was going on outside to think much about herself.

Mrs. Baring, in an exquisite afternoon toilet, accompanied by Maude in an equally charming gown, received, as Ludlowe had predicted, almost every friend of which she had imagined herself the possessor. Gret was presented to them all, and grew so tired of making the little bow that Mrs. Baring had taught her that presently she

forgot all about it half the time. And once, catching Ludlowe's eye full of malicious amusement, she was struck by a sense of absurdity and broke into a little bubble of laughter just as Mrs. Baring turned to present her to the somewhat astonished wife of a naval captain.

Gret watched for the nice gradations of courtesy in the welcoming of callers mentioned by Ludlowe, but, except that now and again she could distinguish an extra burst of graciousness, she was not experienced enough in social matters to detect fine variations. Once, though, toward the middle of the afternoon, when the rooms were filled with people and Mrs. Baring was floating hither and thither, all smiles and chat, and this person and that was approaching Gret and engaging her in conversation—mostly a deft process of questioning, she noticed—there entered a lady who, to Gret's ignorant eye, was one of the most important yet to arrive. And then Gret noticed, not a gradation, but a distinct change in the character of the greetings on all sides. She could not tell where the change came in, but she knew that something about it made her feel uncomfortable. It did not seem to have this effect on the lady in question, however; she went about with a smiling aplomb that Gret was quick to admire. She felt that in some way this woman was showing grit. With her was a dark-faced girl, who, though she was not at all pretty, was so gentle and amiable-looking as to be almost attractive; nevertheless Gret felt sure she noticed the chilliness of their reception, for a timid, startled look came into her eyes, and Gret's sympathy went out to her at once. She seemed not to know exactly what to do, and Gret did not see how she could help her, for Mrs. Baring had not presented her to these people as she had done to all the others. She was wondering and turning the matter over in her mind when she observed Ludlowe coming toward her through the wide, carved

arch dividing the two rooms. He evidently had not noticed the arrival of the lady and the girl, but just as he got near Gret he caught sight of the girl. A slight exclamation seemed to escape his lips, and, veering straight off at a tangent from Gret, he went up to her as she stood hesitatingly near her mother. Gret, watching keenly, saw him greet the lady in a familiar way and then speak to the girl. She saw him lead her away to a group of seats, place her in one and seat himself in another, and his manner and actions were so unusually kindly that Gret was at first inclined to be surprised. Then it seemed to her that she divined his motive, and her heart applauded it. For some reason or other these people were not much liked; but evidently the girl knew and understood nothing of it all, and Ludlowe was sorry for her. It was a nice act, and Gret thought the better of Ludlowe for it.

She stood and watched his face keenly, hoping that, if she could catch his eye, he might invite her over to sit down with him and the girl at the little table. But he never looked once in her direction, and it was borne in upon Gret that, instead of merely not happening to catch her eyes, he carefully avoided doing so. Why? The idea took sudden hold of her. He had evidently known the girl previously, and he was so nice to her. Unusually interested in something that seemed no particular concern of hers, Gret longed to hear Ludlowe talk to this girl, to hear how he talked to her. And presently when Bobbie passed near her and gave an encouraging smile over his shoulder, she made a sudden plan. She beckoned to the amiably beaming youth to come to her, and when he obeyed, expressed herself as weary.

"Can't I sit down at a table or something, as so many of the others are?" she queried, her eyes traveling over to Ludlowe's corner, where two more might easily accommodate themselves.

"Of course," agreed Bobbie, his eyes following hers, though all unaware of being led. "Let 's go over to Errol's table—be fun. Don't very often see him taken up with a girl, eh?" And with a gesture to Gret to follow him Bobbie sailed off to Ludlowe's retreat.

Gret fancied Ludlowe gave him a queer look as they approached, but he accepted the invasion very coolly, making way for Gret to sit by himself.

"So you think you 'll rest a while from your labors," he said quizzically. "What a chatterbox you are."

Gret was indignant at the accusation. "I was n't chattering," she declared. "It was the other women."

Ludlowe laughed; so did the girl—a sweet, merry laugh that Gret liked.

"Yes; she said she was tired," put in Bobbie, who was sitting on the extreme edge of his chair, giving the impression of a bird contemplating flight. "Fancy Gret tired!"

"It is rather funny," commented Ludlowe. "Gret, let me introduce you to Miss Gabrielle Devreux. Miss Gabrielle, this is Miss Margaret Silway."

The girls looked across at one another and smiled in a friendly way, though neither uttered the commonplaces of introduction. Gret had liked the looks of the girl at first glance, and Gabrielle, looking into the keen, bright eyes—over keen, perhaps, for so young a woman—liked her also.

"Are n't you people going to have tea, and some of those hit-and-miss sandwiches or those cute little cakes?" inquired Bobbie.

"Yes; I was just about to go and see what I could gather in," said Ludlowe. "You 're supposed to be doing the honors in that line, are n't you?"

"Yes, I 'm supposed to be," confessed Bobbie with a grin.

"Well, go and bring up an assortment, there 's a good fellow."

Bobbie good-humoredly sauntered off, and Ludlowe turned back to the two girls. "You two ought to be good friends at once," he observed.

"Why?" demanded Gret in her blunt way.

"Because you 're entering upon the same experience at one and the same time. You 're both viewing the delights of civilization for the first time, both taking your first plunge into society for the first time. You can compare notes."

"Have you just come down from the woods, then?" inquired Gret, unable to conjure up any other form of social retirement.

"No; I have always been in a convent," replied Gabrielle.

"Always!" exclaimed Gret, to whose ideas—gathered from fiction, of course—a convent was something on the order of a penitentiary. "Goodness!" She looked curiously at the girl before her, reflecting that she was of surprisingly contented and amiable countenance for one reared in the stern, cold atmosphere of a convent.

Gabrielle looked a trifle surprised, too, that her early life should occasion so much amazement.

"Are n't you glad you 're out?" queried Gret then.

"Out?" inquired Gabrielle.

"Yes, of the convent."

"Oh, yes!" with simple candor, "because I 'm having such a good time. But still the sisters were always kind and good to me, and it was beautiful among the birds and flowers."

Gret stared at this altogether new setting of the convent idea, and Ludlowe, wondering what particular fallacy was being upset, smiled. "Well, have you enjoyed your first social function, Gret?" he inquired.

"Oh,"—Gret glanced round indulgently—"it 's all right. Looks very pretty at first, but after a while it looks all alike."

"Not in it with coming down the skid-road on a chain of logs, eh?" quizzically.

"There are a great many things it 's not in it with," emphatically.

Ludlowe laughed. "And you, Miss Gabrielle? How does this brilliant gathering strike you?"

"It 's very nice," replied Gabrielle with cautious gravity; "and I suppose it would be very enjoyable if one were friendly with every one."

"You 're neither of you as enthusiastic as the occasion demands," said Ludlowe. And then to Gret: "I wonder why Arthur has n't turned up. He said he intended to come. He has n't been up for several days, has he?"

Gret shook her head. "No; but just as soon as he 's got things straightened out in his home he 's going to come and tell us, and then Mrs. Baring will take me down to see it."

"Humph!" Ludlowe looked profoundly disgusted. "He 's worrying and fuming over that confounded place like a lunatic. I saw him yesterday and he looked positively wretched—just seems to have undone in one week all the good the past three months had done him. His mission work has all fallen away, and the 'Christian' housekeeper has just been having a high old time doing nothing and doing it in style. And now Arthur has been chasing about to get another 'Christian' to keep house, and is out in the highways and hedges gathering in sinners."

At the close of this sentence, lengthy for usually lazy lips, Gret burst into her little, irrepressible chuckle of glee. She was overcome by the sight of Gabrielle's face, which, as she listened to Ludlowe's discontented statement of

affairs, was a study in blank amazement. Ludlowe looked up, and catching the expression laughed himself.

"I never saw you really provoked before," remarked Gret with satisfaction.

"Well, he 's simply throwing his life away," said Ludlowe; "literally throwing it away for a pack of thankless people!"

"He that loseth his life shall find it," said Gabrielle softly. And Gret and Ludlowe said no more, because Gabrielle had removed the argument to strange ground.

"Well," said Ludlowe after a moment, "Bobbie has evidently forgotten that we exist. I must go myself and get us some tea, or whatever it is that aunt is dispensing over there."

Standing before a silver urn, and assisted by Maude, Mrs. Baring dispensed tea European fashion, the gentlemen present conveying it to the fair companion of the moment. Ludlowe took up two of the delicate cups that Mrs. Baring had imported herself direct from Paris, and looked coolly at his aunt.

"You want Gret here with you, don't you?"

That lady gave him a wrathful glance. "I should think so!"

Ludlowe looked amused, and strolled back to the two girls. "Gret, aunt wants you to go and help her."

Gret looked at him sharply and questioningly. She did not want to go, and it needed but a word of encouragement from him to make her disregard the summons. But he had not brought her any refreshment, and he looked as if he expected her to go; and so she rose with a sudden movement, and, with a parting smile to Gabrielle, walked off to Mrs. Baring's side. And Ludlowe saw her no more that day, for she carefully avoided him.

After the unpopular and, it must be confessed, more or less notorious, Madame Devreux had borne Gabrielle off,

with many a swish and smile, Ludlowe still sat on, idly watching the throngs of people. And to him presently came Bobbie, pleasantly ignoring all previous lapses of duty.

"The mater says she 's awfully tired, Errol, and we 'll dine strictly *en négligé* to-night; and she wants you to stay."

"Can't, Bobbie; wish I could," replied his cousin, smiling. "That confounded Santa Clara delegation, or committee, or whatever it calls itself, intends to 'wait on me' this evening."

"What for?" inquired Bobbie.

"Oh, going to build a trolley-line out somewhere or other, and wants a piece of land for a park to wind up in."

"Well, so long as you give them a piece right away from your own place," said Bobbie.

"Yes. Oh, I shall turn the whole business over to Calforth with just that provision. What 's the good of a fellow having half a dozen stewards if he has to be pestered afterward?"

"Of course," sympathized Bobbie. "Tell them to go to blazes!"

"I shall, as represented by Calforth," agreed Ludlowe. "So give my adieux to aunt, Bobbie. Tell her I will drop in to dinner to-morrow, if I may. I 'm going to escape now before any further entanglement arises."

"By-by!" said Bobbie, strolling off, and forgetting the message before he was half-way across the room.

As the little family dined quietly together that night Mrs. Baring took the unsuspecting Gret to task for her share in the afternoon's annoyance.

"I 'm going to scold you, Gret," she announced, gazing at that young lady's undisturbed countenance.

"Are you?" said Gret, looking faintly surprised.

"Yes. You were assisting me in the reception of guests, and should not, therefore, have seated yourself in one spot for so long a time. But," indulgently, "you could not be expected to know all these points as yet. Errol should have known better than to have allowed you to stay there. But what I want to take particular exception to is your forming an acquaintanceship with that girl, Gabrielle Devreux!"

"Why, what 's the matter with her?" inquired Gret, her surprise increasing.

"I don't know that anything is the matter, as you call it, with her herself—as yet," replied Mrs. Baring calmly. "But her mother is quite impossible."

Gret only stared at this, to her, totally inexplicable objection. Bobbie burst out laughing, and Maude smiled.

"Lord, mother, what on earth is the use of talking to Gret like that?" demanded Bobbie. "Just look at her face."

"Gret will learn," said Mrs. Baring severely. "It will be necessary for her to know how to make these discriminations if she is ever to take a place in society. I mean," she went on, addressing herself to Gret, "that this Madame Devreux, as she calls herself, is impossible as an acquaintance. When a person acts in such a way as to offend against all the laws of decent and good society, that person has to be dropped."

"Well, Major Ludlowe seems to like them," said Gret sturdily.

"That is nothing. He is a man. Society is not guided at all by what a man does," responded Mrs. Baring. "There is nothing a man—a single man at all events—cannot do except get into jail or become poor."

She did not intend to be epigrammatic, but merely voiced her serious opinion; and Maude, whose usually composed face was somewhat harsh and discontented

to-night, expressed her entire sympathy with the sentiment.

"Yes, indeed. It sounds extreme, but literally it's the truth as society stands to-day. I think it's perfectly hateful to be a woman." And a little sigh that sounded like pure weariness of heart escaped her.

Mrs. Baring glanced covertly at her, in no wise at a loss to understand this sudden vexation of spirit. Indeed, Maude's chagrin formed a part of Mrs. Baring's own displeasure. Had she not watched all that afternoon how Maude's eyes had turned again and again to where Errol sat entertaining that dark-faced girl with the look of perfectly foolish innocence and amiability! And though, of course, Maude was ignoring a real danger for an imaginary one, yet there was no need for her to be disturbed and upset this early in the day. Mrs. Baring could not feel that there was any danger in the Devreux quarter to a man of Errol's cool discretion; for beneath that indolent disregard for people's opinion there was great and unbending pride of family and caste.

"I wonder how she ever began to come here if you don't want her," the thoughtful tones of Gret broke in upon her reflections.

"Oh, I knew her when she was a girl. She is of very good family, indeed," explained Mrs. Baring readily. "At one time she was everything that is desirable. But she branched off into a very headstrong career; and now, in spite of every possible intimation that she is not welcome, she still persists in coming."

"I suppose that is how Major Ludlowe comes to know her, too," surmised Gret.

"Of course. They were children together," said Mrs. Baring. "Errol's mother used to pass a portion of each year on the Santa Clara estate, and the estate of Helen's father, old Mr. Vandyke, adjoins."

"And he never gave her up when she got—got impossible," said Gret.

"No, you bet your boots he did n't," broke in Bobbie. "Errol's not that kind of a fellow."

"Bobbie, I simply will not tolerate such slang," expostulated Mrs. Baring. "It's dreadful. Please remember you have not an audience of loggers now."

Bobbie subsided into crushed silence, and quiet reigned round the table for a few moments. Each was busy with his or her own thoughts; and Gret's, to judge by the tuck of her lips, were very decided ones. She tried to sum up the Devreux case and judge accordingly; but, of course, she was ignorant of some of the main essentials of the case, and her judgments were necessarily one-sided. But one thing she had seen clearly; Ludlowe had sent her away from the little table so that he could have the "impossible girl" all to himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

NOT COUNTING THE COST

THE next morning, as they took their usual drive, Gret detailed to Ludlowe as nearly as possible the chiding she had received the evening before anent the Devreux. And after giving Mrs. Baring's version of the case, she demanded her companion's. "How does it all seem to you?"

And Ludlowe gave, as near as was possible, an account of Madame Devreux's misdemeanors, necessarily omitting, of course, what were really the most serious, and concluding with a brief résumé of the social problem as it stood.

"Of course, aunt's quite right in one way: if your house is to be the thing, you must bar out people like the Devreux. Either that or you must content yourself with that class altogether. The two elements won't mix—can't really. When you're more acquainted with society and its ways you'll find it a mass of contradictions and inconsistencies. The main distinction really is between those that are found out and those that are not. But the distinction remains, nevertheless, and is in full force. However," he added smiling, "you need not bother your head about these matters. You could not hope to grasp these nice discriminations all at once. It will come gradually."

"Still Gabrielle has n't done anything," observed Gret. "It's not her fault what her mother did."

"No; but have n't you ever heard of the sins of the

parents being visited on the heads of the children? Besides," he added, with a sudden return to his old quizzical self, "in that atmosphere she 'll soon learn. Evil comes naturally to a woman."

"Why not—with such good teachers round about them all the time?" retorted Gret instantly, not waiting to comprehend the full sense and meaning of his words. And Ludlowe laughed as he speeded the machine on the long run for the beach.

"Let 's go down and see the seals," proposed Gret, as they ran down the hill to the shore. And so they drove up to the Cliff House, and went through to the veranda over the water. And here Gret leaned her elbow on the sills and gazed down into the lucid, green depths of water beneath them in pure contentment of soul. She watched the tawny, sinuous seals, and saw the ships cross in and out the bay, and sighed for very delight. "It 's all so pretty!"

Ludlowe sat with his face resting on his hands, his eyes, with their look of tired knowledge, resting on the faint rose rim of the horizon. "Yes. When I was a boy, and lay on the shores at Santa Clara, and watched, from among the flowers and grasses, the brown and white sails grow and wane over the rim of the sea, I used to wish I could sail out into the lovely rose morning and drop the sail and stay there in the calm, half awake half asleep, and not have the rose mists go or the sun go down or the night come." He smiled, but the shadows deepened in his eyes. "But the rose lights go, and the night comes—over one's soul."

Gret turned her eyes from the rocks and the water. She looked keenly into her companion's face, and then turned her head away again and wrapped strong, brown fingers round her own face.

"You 're like my sister, Eva. At home, in the morn-

ing, before a hot day, long lines of red mist lie among the far-off pines; and Eva has always been wanting to get into the mists and lie among them and see nothing but rose light. I told her that as soon as she got there the mists would still be farther off. But she would n't believe it; said she did n't want to believe it."

"No. You like to think you can creep off into the beauty of things and be rested." Ludlowe gazed amusedly at the girl's grave face. "But you 're a little materialist. Do you ever get tired, Gret?"

"No," replied Gret truthfully. "Only my 'body sometimes, and then I lie down and sleep."

"You will, some day," said Ludlowe smiling. "We all get tired sooner or later, even if all goes well. There comes a time when you turn away from everything, like a child that drops its toys. When the heart is tired, everything is over."

"Do you think that kind of tiredness comes to workers?" inquired Gret thoughtfully.

"No, I don't. I think it comes after a life has been devoted solely to the pursuit of pleasure," said Ludlowe coolly. "But so often we have to learn too late."

"Is it ever too late?" asked Gret.

"Yes, for some things," quietly.

Silence reigned for a few moments; and then, Ludlowe, catching the eye of a waiter watching from a respectful distance, ordered coffee.

THAT evening Ludlowe dined with the Baring family, discreetly arriving too late for the *tête-à-tête* which he knew his aunt intended to have with him to take place before dinner, probably reasoning that a good dinner would fortify him against the ordeal. At the table the family discussed the visit which Mrs. Baring and Maude and Gret had made that afternoon to Arthur's place.

"The poor boy is so invariably unfortunate in his choice of housekeepers," said Mrs. Baring. "For such a trying position one needs a woman full of tact and—oh, I suppose you would say amiability, or something of that kind."

"Decidedly!" agreed Ludlowe. "Instead of that vinegary old tab he has. What did you think of her, Gret?" noticing that that young lady preserved discreet silence.

"Oh, I did n't like her at all!" immediately; "looks as if she had been killing flies all her life."

Mrs. Baring stared, and Bobbie gurgled, that being all he could do with a mouthful of soup. Ludlowe and Maude burst out laughing.

"That does n't sound at all nice, Gret," expostulated Mrs. Baring. "Though she really does look something like that!" she added.

Gret accepted the reproof with calmness, and Bobbie, who had found his tongue, concluded the discussion:

"Trust Gret to hit the nail on the head every time!"

Mrs. Baring looked severely across at her irrepressibly slangy offspring, and Ludlowe hastened to the rescue.

"Found any one to go up and join Bertie yet, Bobbie?"

"Oh, yes. I was going to tell you," brightly; "Ostan-der and Hewlett are going—next week. They'll be just the fellows, won't they?"

"Yes," assented Ludlowe idly. "Yes, I imagine they'll be able to get as much fun out of the expedition as any one."

"I'm awfully glad it's all arranged," said Bobbie, contentedly. "Now I can go ahead and have a good time."

"I thought you had been going ahead in that line at a pretty good gait," observed his cousin. And Bobbie laughed.

In about three weeks' time Gret wrote a letter to Eva.

To her mother she had written upon her arrival in San Francisco, which she felt ended her responsibilities in that quarter. The girls had agreed to write, but had also agreed that, as the pen was a strange and unwieldy instrument in their hands, it would be a mere formality. The real comparing of notes would come when they met again. For knowledge of anything and everything of importance that transpired during her absence Gret depended on Jake, who had volunteered his services as scribe, declaring himself as really more at home in that capacity than in his chosen profession; and, indeed, the handwriting, with highly curled and ornate capitals, which appeared on the envelopes handed to Gret was not at all bad; and the style of the epistles, which were very voluminous, was flowing and easy, so much so that sometimes one meaning slid into another. Gret read these epistles out loud for the benefit of the one-time dwellers on the Wishkah, suppressing with unbroken voice and admirable solemnity such portions as she deemed it unfair or unwise to read.

Mrs. Silway, when teaching the girls to write, had told them that a long or complex sentence was never advisable, and that the height of literary excellence lay in short and concise ones. That Gret had not failed to absorb her teachings was evident in her letter, written in a large, bold hand.

“MY DEAR EVA :

“I have been in San Francisco three weeks now. It is a beautiful city in parts. Most of the people that I meet seem to live in a silly way. They dress up all the time, and go to teas of different colors. I have been to a pink tea and a green tea and a chrysanthemum tea and a heart tea. And one person does not know some one else because they are higher up or lower down. But I like

going for drives in the automobile. And I like going to the theater pretty well. I have some awfully pretty dresses. You will see them all when I come. How many books have you read? Remember them all till I come. How is Jack? Please give my love to mother. And I send my love to you, Evie.

“Your loving sister,

“MARGARET SILWAY.”

This took Gret about half an hour to write, and then she read it over with critical eyes. Then she laughed, a little, bubbling, chuckling laugh. It sounded to her rather like a section of the primer out of which she could remember laboriously spelling her first reading lessons. “I see a cat. It has two kittens.”

Gret received several letters from Jake altogether; but toward the end of November she received one that puzzled her a little. It was quite a newsy letter, and so sufficient excuse for itself in every way; but at the end of the epistle was a postscript over which Gret puzzled considerably:

“P.S. I guess you ’ll perhaps be having a bit of a surprise one of these days. Don’t say I don’t know nothing about it.”

Gret discussed this postscript over the luncheon-table, and the assembled family speculated upon it.

“Perhaps your people are going to move to Portland to live,” suggested Mrs. Baring.

“Don’t think so,” laughed Gret. “Father would n’t keep them all at the Portland Hotel.”

“No,” agreed Maude. “They ’d see too much of the inner workings of the lumber business.”

“Perhaps the old man ’s going to sell out,” hazarded Bobbie.

"What would he do that for?" inquired Gret. "He 'd only have to buy another camp again."

"I 'm sure I can't think what it could be, then," declared Mrs. Baring.

"Rather odd to warn you of a surprise," observed Maude.

"Oh, I know what he 's done that for," said Gret with a chuckle. "He knows that after it comes—whatever it is—it would be no good telling me he knew all about it all the time."

"Yes; you have to take due precautions in dealing with Gret," remarked Bobbie. "She 's such an awful little skeptic."

"Oh, well, I expect it 's some unimportant matter really," said Mrs. Baring after a moment. "Small happenings are magnified in small communities. Some one or other married, perhaps that servant of yours."

"Well, but that would n't be a surprise on *me* in particular," argued Gret.

"No, that surprise would be principally on Lizzie," said Bobbie with a short laugh.

"Oh, no, indeed," contradicted Gret, in amusement. "Not if I know Lizzie. It would be on the other fellow—a surprise that would n't wear out in a hurry, either."

They laughed, and the subject was dropped. Gret thought of it once or twice afterward, and then dismissed the matter with a frown. Time enough to be surprised when surprise came; just now she had other things to think of.

MRS. BARING was going to give a dance for Gret. The "lumber magnate's daughter from up Bobbie's way" had become quite popular in a sort of impersonal way. Young army and navy men, whose pay was generally inadequate to their mode of life, decided that her father's supposed

thousands would help out very pleasantly, and made much of her; and ladies with eligible sons, quite convinced in their own minds that Mrs. Baring had selected Gret for Bobbie, longed to cut her out. And then the girl herself "took," as Bobbie remarked, for the very simple reason that she did not care an atom whether she did or not. She was not inclined to flirt, which greatly commended her to the female portion of her set; and, in addition to the halo of her father's money, she was a kind of attractive puzzle to the young male portion thereof. She had a way of looking at them with a sort of amusement, as if she were wondering whether they really existed or whether they were worth the ground they occupied, which kept them in a certain spicy uncertainty as to her secret opinion of them. And this uncertainty, it may be remarked, was the kindest thing about the opinion. For down in her heart Gret was full of a mild contempt for the society youth she met. All her life she had been surrounded by men—rough, and even sometimes uncouth, it is true, but still men, working for the subsistence they took from the earth, virile, earnest, and undaunted by difficulty. And though Gret had no particular standard by which to judge men—indeed, she did not know that she judged them at all—yet something, some strong instinct within her, which never failed to assert itself, made these men she was now meeting for the first time for the most part physically and mentally distasteful. Highly educated, many of them educated abroad, handsome in many instances, and perfectly at home at any kind of a function, yet Gret could not take them seriously. To her they were a set of polished mountebanks, spending their time in preparing themselves for teas, receptions, and dances; and she could not imagine how other girls managed to feel flattered by their attentions and soft speeches, and even, it seemed, to fall in love with them. Gret's leaning,

or rather her interest, was toward men much older than herself. Now and again she met men distinguished in this line or that, who claimed her immediate attention; but this was not often, for the reason that men with a purpose in life rarely trouble society much. She noted with a sort of satisfied pride that Ludlowe was not to be seen at the round of smart functions to which Mrs. Baring so industriously led her; occasionally he would attend an affair, generally at his aunt's urgent request; but he was always most distinctly a man apart from the throng.

After Mrs. Baring had decided on giving a dance for Gret, she instructed Gret to write to her father for money for a gown suitable for the occasion. Gret did so, though frankly informing her hostess of her doubts as to the outcome of the appeal.

"Well, of course, if he won't send us the money we must do the best we can without it," observed that lady philosophically. "I'm so glad I was thoughtful enough to put in that length of cream silk organdy while we were in Portland. If your father sends us money we'll have it trimmed—let me see—what would you have it trimmed with?" turning reflectively to Maude.

"I would n't trim it all," replied that lady decidedly. "I hate to see a debutante loaded down with gimps and laces. It's a rich length, and if it's well made—"

"Yes," assented Mrs. Baring, interrupting. "You're right. We'll put the money into the make. We'll take her to Madame Bertinelle."

"Better wait till you hear from father," observed Gret.

"I suppose so," resignedly. "How much money have you left, Gret?"

"I've got seven dollars left out of the fifty father gave me when I came away," replied Gret; "and I've got one hundred dollars in my trunk."

"You have!" gasped her astonished hostess. "Where did you get that, pray?"

"Out of the bank before I left Quellish. Thought I might need it. Never can tell. Still," with a business-like air, "I don't want to spend it if I can help it. I don't suppose I 'll ever get any more—of my own—and—oh, can't tell what may turn up. Some day I may need money awfully."

"Quite right," commented Mrs. Baring. "You 're the longest-headed girl for your age that I ever met. Upon my word, you are. Is n't she, Maude?"

Maude glanced with a sort of friendly smile at the girl. "It 's well for her that she is," she remarked by way of reply.

In a few days came Mr. Silway's reply to Gret's letter. He enclosed two ten-dollar bills, with the remark that that was all he could spare just then. He informed his daughter that his health had been far from good during the last two months, and that he was in the hands of a physician and about to go home for rest and recuperation. Gret, who knew her father so well, read smothered rage in every line of the curt, yet garrulous communication.

"If only he had me there!" she said with a laugh. "I 'm awfully sorry for the folks at home when he goes up for a rest. He 'll be the only one in the house that does rest; that 's one thing. Well, I 've got twenty dollars, anyway."

"Well," said Mrs. Baring thoughtfully, "we must manage somehow. I don't suppose madame will charge more than twenty-five or thirty dollars for making a plain, untrimmed gown. The question is, would you have it made high or low?" wondered Mrs. Baring.

"I always think a high neck is best taste for a debutante," answered Maude. "Don't you? Besides, I imagine Gret's neck is still brown above her collar—browner than the underneath. I believe it would show."

"It does!" corroborated Gret. "Plain as a timber-line."

"Yes. Well, I 'd have it shirred right up to the neck, part way down the sleeves and a puff to the elbow," advised Maude.

"Yes, I believe that would be about as taking as anything," agreed Mrs. Baring. "We 'll take her to madame this very afternoon." Then with a speculative eye on Gret: "I think cream ought to look pretty well on Gret."

"No doubt it will," agreed Maude with her lack of enthusiasm. Maude was not looking altogether her serene self. Round about her mouth were nervous lines that told of a soul in suspense and unrest. Many a time lately had Maude taken herself to task for the aimless game of waiting she was playing; and yet she could not tear herself away. The episode of the Devreux girl on the afternoon of the first 'at-home' had shown her how frail, after all, was the foundation on which she built her hopes. Some day, any day, might sweep them out of sight.

"I suppose, Gret," said the voice of Bobbie, breaking in on her reflections, as that gentleman looked up from the remains of a cold duck, "you 'll be all puffed up on the night of the jamboree high-monkey-monk in a new frock made by a Madame Parlez-vous, shirred up to the neck and all down the front—"

"Bobbie, don't tease," remonstrated his mother.

Gret nodded contentedly. "Of course."

"Well, you 're welcome!" said Bobbie with a chuckle. "You 'll have to dance with every guy that 's there!"

"I don't think so," responded Gret undisturbed. "For one thing, I can't dance."

There was a moment's silence, as if a bomb had suddenly fallen on the table. Then Mrs. Baring threw up her hands.

"Goodness gracious! The idea of giving a dance for a

girl who does n't dance! Why ever did n't you speak before?"

"Why, I never thought of it!" answered Gret truthfully, a trifle surprised herself at the new aspect of affairs.

Bobbie went off into fits of laughter, and even Maude laughed heartily.

"You must go to a dancing-master at once," went on Mrs. Baring still horrified. "I 've bespoken the parlors. Besides, I 've mentioned my plans to several. We can't draw back now."

"Oh, Bobbie and I can teach her," said Maude, still smiling. "Can't we, Bobbie?"

"Oh, I suppose so," agreed Bobbie, grimly. "I 've nothing specially tender in the way of corns. Just as long as she does n't want to dance with me on *the* night."

"But I shall," said Gret calmly. "Because you 'll know how I dance. If I dance one or two dances with you I shall begin to feel my feet."

"Yes, and so shall I!" said Bobbie ruefully. "Don't see why *I* should be crippled up at the start."

"You 'll get over it," observed Gret, philosophically.

For the next week it seemed to Gret that her time was about equally divided between the modiste and the parlor-carpet, upon which she mastered some of the intricacies of modern dancing. She soon learned the different steps, but as Bobbie ungraciously, but truthfully, remarked, she would never make a good dancer. She was lithe and sinuous and springy, but not yielding; and as for gliding, there was not a glide in her body.

As she had said to Eva, there were some things in her new life that Gret liked; but, take it all in all, she was heartily tired of it after the first month. And if just to pay the visit and be entertained had been all the motive for her coming to San Francisco, Gret would assuredly have been back home before this. But it was not all, nor

the beginning, nor anything at all of her motive. For one thing, she had calmly decided with herself that it was advisable, if not exactly necessary, to become civilized, or, at all events, to learn what civilization was; and for another, she was following her lifelong rule of taking the good whenever she could and meeting the evil when she must. She had followed a star. One night it would set suddenly from out of her horizon; but at least she had followed it as long as she could.

One afternoon she sat thinking of these things when Ludlowe entered the room; he always came and went unannounced in the Baring household. Gret was alone and sitting very still, her fingers clasped loosely over a letter. It was this letter that had made her think.

Ludlowe seated himself in a long, low chair, and threw back his head with an air of weariness that did not escape Gret. He looked the girl over from between half-closed lids.

"You are in such repose, Gret, that it is quite restful to look at you. What have you there—a letter from home?"

"Yes." Gret rustled the letter ever so little. "It is from mother. She thinks I should come home now. I have been here over a month, and she does n't want me to outstay my welcome."

Ludlowe smiled. "Have you enjoyed yourself so far, Gret?"

"Yes and no," replied Gret, smiling, too.

"Explain," commanded Ludlowe, amused.

"Why, there were some things I knew I should n't like," said Gret thoughtfully. "And then, again, there were some things I knew I should like, and I have."

"I observe an excellent diplomat in embryo!" said Ludlowe. "You have apparently explained, but I am as wise as I was before."

Gret laughed, but offered no further explanations, and

Ludlowe pursued the subject. "May I inquire what you have *not* liked?"

"Oh, I don't care much for the parties and receptions, and all that sort of thing." Gret looked a trifle apologetic. "It seems to me it makes people very busy doing nothing."

"It does," agreed Ludlowe. "And so you don't think you'd like to live this life altogether?"

"No." Gret shook her head. "I can't see how it is necessary for people—even those that belong to this kind of life—to live it just the way they do."

"There is no necessity; it's choice. They don't know of anything better," explained Ludlowe.

"*You* don't seem to have to be on the go all the time!"

Ludlowe smiled. "Every one thinks it simply shocking the way I neglect social duties. But how do you come to be alone, Gret?"

"Mrs. Baring and Miss Vibart had to go to the modiste's," explained Gret, pronouncing the French word with grave ease; "and then they had a few calls to make. But I expect they'll be home soon. It's getting late, is n't it?" glancing at a clock. "Did you want to see Mrs. Baring very particularly?"

"Oh, no," calmly. "I think I'm rather glad to have missed her."

"Tired?" inquired Gret, with a glance of keen scrutiny.

"I have an intolerable headache," replied Ludlowe, smiling. "Stupid thing for a man to have, is n't it?"

Gret smiled, but said nothing; and so they sat in silence, while the short, swift twilight fell. It was equally characteristic of both that if nothing specially occurred to them to say they recognized no necessity for speech.

Presently, however, Ludlowe rose. "I think I shall go, Gret. Aunt will be appearing on the scene soon, now, and I am less in the mood for talk than ever." He

held out his hand, and in response to this Gret got up and approached him, hardly knowing why. She glanced up in his face, feeling more than seeing the gaze of the quiet, tired, but searching eyes.

"Does your head still ache?" He nodded. "I 'm sorry. Will you be able to do anything for it?"

"I don't know." He looked down on the girl with sudden mischief. "But you could do something for it."

"I?" She scanned his face questioningly. "What could I do?"

He took the hands clasped loosely before her. "You can kiss me good-night."

Gret glanced down at her imprisoned hands, and then looked up again in that wide, unshrinking way she had when startled or particularly interested—just as he knew she would. For a moment or so she met calmly enough the sleepy, yet potent gaze of the man, and then, perhaps for the first time in her life, her eyes fell, forced down by something in his. The warm blood flew into her face, and something leaped up from her heart and seethed in her brain—something bewildering, and yet not altogether strange. For no simplicity, however absolute, no ignorance of the ways of men however utter, can veil away for one moment the primal instincts of a woman who stands before her master, too terribly primitive and fundamental for culture ever to eliminate, too sweet and natural for custom ever to stale.

Ludlowe stood looking down on the girl for a moment, content to wait on her hesitation. Then, still with the indulgent smile on his lips, he bent and kissed her, whispering good-night with his cheek against hers. And then he left her—a woman standing at the gates of dawn.

All that evening Gret was very quiet, though none remarked that particularly, for she was often so. But if those around her had not been so intent on other matters

they might have remarked the faint, sweet smile that played about her lips and the dreaming light in the usually wide, alert eyes. Like most quiet people, Gret was very intense. Her joys and her sorrows did not effervesce into words and flow over into the ear of some confidant. In silence within her they grew and waxed strong. A kiss set on her lips had waked undreamed-of passions, and all that night she lay and gazed at the dark blue of the sky through the open window of her bedroom.

But the next morning as, taking Ludlowe's hand, she climbed into the auto for their morning drive, she veiled beneath a greater deliberation of manner than usual the faint trepidation of spirit that would make itself felt.

Without consulting his companion as to the direction of their drive for that morning, Ludlowe turned the machine up the avenue for Golden Gate Park. "We 'll drive to the Cliff and take our coffee with the seals," he remarked. "I want to talk to you, Gret."

Gret glanced instantly and covertly at her companion, and Ludlowe caught the look. He laughed. "Why do you look at me like that?"

"I was looking to see if you were cross, and were perhaps going to give me a scolding," confessed Gret, smiling.

"And you were going to take it with becoming meekness, of course?" quizzed Ludlowe. "No, I am not going to scold. Going to have a little business chat with you."

This puzzled Gret more than ever; but she asked no questions, and they drove down to the beach with little more than a few cursory remarks on either side. At the Cliff House Gret walked out upon the veranda and sat down near the parapet. Ludlowe drew a seat near her, and they prepared to be comfortable for a half-hour or so. Ludlowe inquired if she would care for coffee just then, but Gret thought not. "Well, then, we 'll talk matters

over." He leaned his head back in the chair, and looked with quiet, amused eyes into the puzzled, expectant face of the girl opposite him. "About your mother's letter, Gret—have you answered it yet?"

"No." Gret shook her head. "I was going to speak to Mrs. Baring about it to-day."

"Yes? Well, I did n't want you to answer it until I had spoken to you, and that is why I choose such an odd time and place for what I am about to say." He glanced about. They were quite alone on the wide, overhanging verandah. Then his eyes wandered out to sea, and then back to the intent face of the girl. "I meant to wait a little longer before speaking. Though I don't think it matters very much. I believe you can form an opinion now as completely and safely as you could a month hence. You have seen my life, Gret; or at least something of it. Do you think you would care to share it?"

Gret started violently, and gazed at the man before her with wide, questioning eyes. "You mean—"

"Yes; I mean marry me, of course." And then, taking no apparent notice of her amazement, "Of course, it could not be as free a life as you have led; but it will still be more free than the lives of most of the women you can observe around you. We will not trouble society much, nor let it trouble us. And to begin with, to break the change, I would send for the yacht and take you on a long trip. What do you think of the idea, Gret? We don't either of us run to sentiment much; but our tastes seem to be similar in the main, and I believe we should be very companionable. Don't you think so? What do you say?"

What did she say! It seemed to Gret that the blood released from her heart rushed in one great wave to her face, even blinding her eyes for the moment. She could hardly believe that in this quiet way he was asking her to

be his wife! She had never imagined such a possibility. Why, she had been afraid, she had thought—

But her whole being turned to him without a moment's thought. She did not think for a second of the wealth this man had, nor of the position in which he could place her; she thought nothing of right or wrong, of the past or of the future. She only knew that he said "Come and be with me." And if death had threatened every step of her way, she would not have hesitated.

For love has no yesterday and no to-morrow; it has but to-day.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SUMMONS HOME

IN the days that first followed the announcement of her engagement to Errol Ludlowe, Gret did not pay much attention to current events, or the actions of those around her, or she would surely have noticed many more things than she did. Maude was confined to her room with a bad headache for two days, but Gret thought nothing particularly of it. There was no very perceptible change in her manner when she emerged from her solitude, for Maude was too diplomatic to let her sore amaze and defeat be seen. Neither would she beat any very hasty retreat from the field; she had too much pride for that.

And congratulations flowed in upon Gret from all sides, accompanied by such a marked change of bearing on the part of her acquaintances that, if Gret had been less wrapped up in herself and her happiness than she was, she must have noticed and been amused.

Within a few days there came replies from Mr. and Mrs. Silway to the letters addressed to each by Ludlowe. Gret also received a letter from each of her parents. Mrs. Silway expressed quiet pleasure at the news sent her; Mr. Silway, in transmitting the requisite parental consent, expressed the same amount of pleasure in a more pompous way. But from Eva came never a word; and Gret wondered at that.

Backed by instructions from Ludlowe, Mrs. Baring

made a very handsome affair of the dance she gave for Gret. The news of the girl's engagement leaked about with great rapidity, too, and made a great many anxious to see her who otherwise would not have been in the least interested. On the eventful evening Gret stood by Mrs. Baring, as did also Maude, and, for a time, Bobbie. The latter, as soon as the room began to fill, flitted off, however, followed by a warning glance from Gret, to which he replied with an artfully concealed grimace.

Gret contrived to get through her dances without any very great show of awkwardness, though doubtless her partners realized that they had danced with better dancers. She liked standing and looking on better than anything else, a predilection which Mrs. Baring discovered and warned her against. If she could have done this, she would have been content all night, her eyes were so keen to catch every move, every little scheme, each decoying glance. As, however, she had to talk and dance and otherwise make herself agreeable, she was bored before two hours were over.

To her delight and relief, while the evening was yet young, Ludlowe and Massinger came in together. Arthur, while not leaning greatly toward dances or anything of that kind, and attending this one purely on Gret's account, did not share the dislike, on moral grounds, that many of his clerical brethren cherished. Bobbie brought the two men up to Gret, who greeted them with open satisfaction.

"Give me the next dance, Gret," said Ludlowe, taking her program. "It's a waltz."

"No. 'Don't want it,'" advised Gret. "You know I don't dance, really."

"Never mind. You may as well dance with me as any one," replied Ludlowe, scribbling his initials.

"Well, not a waltz, then. I do a minuet best."

"Listen to her! 'Do it!'" said Bobbie. "She *does* 'do' a minuet pretty well, though. She bends nicely."

Ludlowe laughed. "How do you like dancing, Gret?"

"I don't call it dancing," replied Gret, glancing at the couples just gliding off into a dreamy waltz melody. "I call it wriggling round."

"'Breathes there a girl with soul so dead!'" gasped Bobbie.

"There was a time in my callow youth—about the age of Bobbie here," said Ludlowe with a glance at that gentleman, "when I thought dancing the most divine invention of the ages. Now certain conditions must be present before I can tolerate it at all. Gret, let's you and I conspire together. I'll put my name down for three dances if you'll promise to sit them out."

"Oh, yes!" agreed Gret with delight. "In that way we can sit and look on most of the time, can't we?"

"Yes, and mother won't do a thing to you to-morrow," threatened Bobbie.

"Nor to you with your slang. Be off, young man!" said Ludlowe sternly. "Had n't you a partner for this waltz?"

"Yes, but she wants to sit it out with young Leland."

"How do you know she does?"

"Because she's tucked carefully away behind a palm," responded Bobbie with a grin. "She would n't be if she wanted me to find her. Of course, I shall say I looked everywhere, and do the injured!"

"Of course—hypocrite!"

"Yes. I'm having a lovely time!" declared Bobbie with a bland smile. He turned on his heel. "Now I'm going to put the mater next to your little dodges."

He did not, of course. But it might almost be thought that he had, for that lady surprised the three as they were sitting out the third dance and broke up the

combine immediately. She took Gret to be introduced to a big railroad man's wife, and Errol she almost commanded:

"You dance with Maude, now, Errol. You need not slight her altogether."

Ludlowe glanced at his aunt, a certain slight drooping of the lids betraying displeasure. "I have n't danced with any one so far. I certainly have no wish to neglect Miss Vibart any more than any other of my friends."

Mrs. Baring safely launched Gret on a waltz, which eventually landed her high and dry at the top of the long ball-room. The railroad man's wife was sitting near where Mrs. Baring stood, and she motioned to Gret to be seated by her side. She was disposing of an ice, and Gret's partner went to fetch one for her.

"This is your first season," opined Mrs. Railroad affably.

"Yes."

"And I expect you find it all new and delightful."

"I find most of it idiotic," responded Gret. She had hated her waltz, and was in an aggressively truthful mood.

"Indeed!" The smile was still on the august lady's lips, but it was, perhaps, not quite so condescending and pleasant. "Well, when you become a hostess we shall see what innovations you make. What—er—idiotic element shall you eliminate from your affairs, pray?"

"The smiling, if I could," said Gret.

"The what?"

"The smiling. Does n't it make you tired—the perpetual smiling of every one?" inquired Gret confidentially. "They smile when they come and when they go and all the way between. I think they're afraid people would be insulted if they were to stop for a minute. If I were a hostess I think I would have a sign tacked up all along my wall: 'Not required to smile all the time.'"

"Well, who ever heard!" breathed the railroad man's wife, swallowing her last mouthful of ice with a distinct effort.

But Gret did not observe the effect of her words on her companion. Her partner came up with an ice, and she ate it reflectively. Then she glanced at her program. The next dance was a quadrille with the initials E. L. against it, and she gave a little inward sigh of relief. She did not trouble to talk to the important and somewhat supercilious youth at her side, but sat looking down the long room with its crowd of handsomely dressed beings. A great many of them—the younger ones, anyway—looked happy. She wondered if they were really, if any of them were as happy as she was. And then somehow her thoughts went out to Gabrielle. Poor Gabrielle, born into wrong and misfortune, and too gentle, Gret felt, to ever force her way out of adverse circumstances. Ludlowe came up, and Gret glanced at him with a smile.

"This is my dance, I think, Gret," he said with commendable gravity. And Gret rose, and, bowing to her previous partner, went off with content in her heart.

"I was just thinking," she said, as Ludlowe piloted her to a shady corner whereof he knew, "that I wish Gabrielle were here."

"I'm glad she is n't," replied Ludlowe quietly.

"Oh, well," went on Gret quickly, "there are too many here to—to—you know—And we could have kept her happy."

"That is the first time, Gret, that I remember hearing you speak a broken or hesitating sentence," reproved Ludlowe. "Your frank outspokenness is usually one of the best things about you. Is society spoiling you already?"

"Well, I meant, to be unkind to her, and did n't know how to put it," apologized Gret. "Because unkind is n't

exactly the thing. You see, I need new words nowadays."

"You think there are too many here for all to give her the cold shoulder?" said Ludlowe. "Oh, it's wonderful how that sort of thing spreads. There's Arthur. He's looking for us, no doubt. How can we attract his attention without attracting that of other people as well, I wonder. Wave your program gently, Gret."

Gret did so, and Arthur's searching eye caught the movement. He came up gladly and seated himself with a little sigh that might be either weariness or relief. He was looking handsome, though very tired and worn.

"Well, Gret," glancing down on her with gentle curiosity, "does all this enchant you?"

"No." Gret shook her head summarily. "Although," she added quickly, "I think it's awfully good of Mrs. Baring to do all this for me. Of course, she thinks I'll like it. I suppose I'm too green yet."

"Too sensible is nearer the mark," asserted Ludlowe, consulting a small watch produced from somewhere out of sight.

"What time is it?" inquired Gret.

"Quarter to two. Arthur, you're worn out, old man. Go home and turn in."

"How much longer will this last?" wondered Gret.

"Not much after three, I think," said Ludlowe. "Aunt and Miss Vibart won't be up till after noon to-morrow, Gret. What are you going to do with yourself?"

"I don't know," replied Gret thoughtfully.

"What would you like to do?"

"I should like to go down town and look in all the store-windows just as long as I like," replied Gret promptly.

Ludlowe groaned. "Well! So be it, then. Can't you come, Arthur?"

"There 's a woman dying slowly of consumption in a room on Howard Street," he said. "She has n't a soul to do anything for her. And so Patty—that 's a poor girl I have with me—and I go every morning and make her as comfortable as we can. It does Patty good; makes her forget her own troubles. It would make it too late for you to wait for me."

Gret looked sympathetic. "Can't we come and see her too?"

"That would only embarrass her," said Arthur gently.

At three the people began to go, as Ludlowe had predicted. But it was four o'clock before Mrs. Baring and her party were free to put on their wraps and drive home. Once in bed, Gret did not review the events of the evening, but promptly fell asleep.

It had been arranged between Gret, Ludlowe and Mrs. Baring that she should remain in San Francisco for at least another month before going home to prepare for her marriage. Mrs. Baring predicted that, as soon as the news of her engagement to Ludlowe became known, Gret would be entertained far and wide—a prospect that did not fill her with very great delight. However, Gret received a letter from home one morning that altered the situation. It was written by Eva at her mother's request.

"DEAR GRET:" (she wrote)

"Mother wants you to come home just as soon as you get this. Father is very sick. We have a nurse in the house and one doctor. Another doctor is coming from Portland to-morrow. If he says so, father will have an operation. Mother says please take the very next train.

"Your loving sister,

"EVA."

Gret frowned reflectively as she read the letter. She was struck by the entire absence of any personal note in the communication—"Mother says"—and then Eva had never written since the news of her engagement reached home. Could she be offended in any way? However, she would soon see. She put the letter into Mrs. Baring's hands without a word.

"Dear me! Sounds quite urgent; what a pity!" exclaimed that lady. "I suppose you—"

"Yes, I must go home at once," said Gret quietly. "When is the next train?"

THAT evening Ludlowe and Arthur, Bobbie and Mrs. Baring escorted Gret over to Oakland in order to see her safely on the Southern Pacific train. It was a frankly regretful group that stood to say good-by as the girl was about to board the car. Gret's dislike at parting was openly expressed.

Ludlowe kissed her good-by, Bobbie insisted on following suit, and Arthur refused to be left out in the cold. And so Gret kissed them all, and then a moment later went on board, followed by the procession laden with candy, rugs, and magazines. She was safely ensconced in a chair, hedged about with all possible comfort, then the train pulled out and Gret was gone.

Bobbie was unusually silent as they crossed back to San Francisco. Presently he turned on his unsuspecting mother.

"Good old Gret! I'll tell you what—that's a pretty good walk-over for the camp-girl. Eh, mother? And we're every one of us sorry to see her go, too. You bet! Gret's a little devil, and is going to do just as she likes; but her heart's in the right place all the time."

"Bobbie!" breathed his scandalized mother.

CHAPTER XX

THE FIRST SHADOW

FOR once, as she went northward, Gret's fellow-passengers were not of such absorbing and satisfying interest as usual. She treated each one to a more or less cursory inspection and then turned back to the window and her own reflections, from which none attempted to arouse her. The sociably and charitably inclined were not moved to pity by her solitary state, for her expression was too thoughtful and businesslike to be construed into one of loneliness; and the flirtatiously inclined among the men could find no possible excuse for advances in the casual glances she now and then cast about the car.

Gret's thoughts were divided between her destination and the scenes she had just left. She thought for a while, with a little smile on her lips, of the leave-taking at Oakland, and over the wide, bright eyes there fell the strange, mistlike curtain of a soul withdrawn for the moment from outward things.

Then Gret thought of home, and of Eva's letter, and of her father's illness. She wondered if it were really serious, or if he were just making his usual fuss about nothing. In that case Gret hardly thought her mother would cause her to be sent for. She wondered and then suddenly she ceased her speculations as a futile occupation. Soon she would be home to see for herself.

She stayed one night in Portland. Knowing no other, she got into the Hotel Portland 'bus and was driven to

that commodious hostelry. Next morning she paid her bill with much inward wonderment, but no outward comment. She was not much accustomed to using her arithmetical powers, but a hasty computation of the probable cost of each year of the many her father had spent there occurred to her.

As she completed the final and most primitive stages of her homeward journey, Gret was conscious of a humor, an amusement, that had not before been possible to her. Before this comparisons of any kind had been out of the question for one who knew little beyond the simple life of the backwoods. Now she knew at least two aspects of life, two so entirely at variance that she could not but be amused; she exercised an odd, unconscious care, however, that her comparisons did not belittle that life to which she was still quite loyal.

It was early evening when Gret finally reached Quellish. It had been raining, for the starlight sparkled on wet roof and walk; but the air was soft and fragrant, and its damp sweetness was dear to the nostrils of the Northern girl. She walked quickly through the little town, not pausing to reveal herself to the many acquaintances who passed unsuspectingly by the smartly dressed girl. At the foot of the loggers' steps several boats were moored together. Gret suspected that they were mostly from her own camp, but not being able to distinguish much in the starlight, she felt carefully on the oars for the rough carved "S" that distinguished the camp boats, and, having found it, climbed unceremoniously into the outer boat and rowed off.

As she felt the grip of her oars on the water, and felt the boat glide obediently forward, Gret gave a little sigh of satisfaction. The old sense of defiant freedom came back to her. Before half a mile was covered her coat was pulled off and the stylish collar and trim belt summarily

removed. The river was a ribbon of softest velvet, spangled over with starbeams, and the pines whispered in little tittering rushes of sound. And Gret rowed evenly and leisurely, having no particular desire to hurry her long row to a close.

Arrived at her landing, however, she grasped her long skirts in both hands and scampered up the steps in her old lithe way. There was an unusual number of lights about the house, otherwise all was quiet as usual, and Gret passed round to the kitchen from long force of habit. Standing with arms akimbo, staring vacantly out through the open door, was Lizzie, and she jumped with a startled scream as Gret appeared in the square of darkness formed by the doorway.

"Gracious me, Gret!" And then, her quick feminine eye taking in the radical change in the girl's appearance:

"Goodness, it did n't take long to make a fine lady out of you, did it?"

"Did n't take long to make me look like one," amended Gret briefly.

She entered and threw herself in the little wooden rocker that was Lizzie's one article of luxury. She looked round the small kitchen, with its scrubbed floor and table and ancient cookstove, with smiling eyes. How "homey" it all was, after all.

"Ma write for you to come home?" queried Lizzie, who was still "taking her in."

"No."

"Eva did, then?"

Gret nodded, looking at Lizzie with a smile. "Got any coffee, Lizzie?"

"Oh, my!" Lizzie reached the stove in two jumps, and drew the kettle forward. "Never thought about that! Are you hungry, Gret?" Gret nodded again. Lizzie dis-

appeared into the pantry. "Like a piece of warm mince pie?" she inquired from within.

"Yes," said Gret, "and some cottage cheese and bread and butter, and—that 's all I want, Lizzie."

Lizzie prepared this menu with much whisking and fussing, and then, when Gret was fairly started on the meal, seated herself near and prepared to converse.

"What all did you do down in San Francisco, Gret?"

Gret laughed. "No good beginning to tell you to-night, Lizzie. I 'd never get through." And then, in order to divert Lizzie's conversational bent into other channels: "How is father to-night?"

"Operated to-day," replied Lizzie. "There 's two doctors and a nurse there; and one went home to-day."

"Oh!" Gret opened her eyes. "Has he been operated on already?" Lizzie nodded. "When?"

"This afternoon."

"Well! What was it for? Did it take long?"

"Yes—'pendicitis," explained Lizzie in triumph.

"Oh!" said Gret, who had not the faintest idea in the world as to the type of malady represented by that term. "Two doctors with him?" she repeated.

"Well, one of them 's gone home," amended Lizzie; "but there 's a nurse!" And she gave a slight additional lift to the organ already elevated by nature.

Gret was quick to catch the gesture. "Don't like her?" she queried.

"No! Never saw such a got-up thing in your life," declared Lizzie. "Blue print dress, all starched. Apron with great long strings all spread out," spreading her hands in an imaginary fan behind herself. "Cuffs. Cap with more strings. Humph! Thinks she 's such a boss cook, too, that nobody else but her can do anything. And picks up everything like she was afraid it was awful dirty!"

Gret laughed, both at Lizzie's portrayal of the obnoxious nurse and at the mental picture she could conjure up of their attitude toward one another.

"Does she eat down-stairs with us?" she inquired. Lizzie nodded. "Where 's Eva, I wonder," said Gret then.

"Up-stairs, I guess."

"And mother?"

"Don't know if she 's up-stairs or not."

In a few moments Gret went along the little, narrow passage that led to the front of the house in search of her mother. Contemplation seemed to be the order of the evening, for Mrs. Silway, too, sat gazing before her, hands folded in her lap. Her quiet eyes fell on Gret, noting instantly with a certain quick pleasure the marked change in her appearance. Then she rose and kissed her with a kindly smile of welcome.

"I 'm so glad you 've come, Gret. I have been afraid that perhaps Eva did not make it sufficiently imperative that you should start at once, and I was too worried at the time to give her very explicit instructions. Moreover, matters then were not so serious as they are now. Your father underwent an operation at noon, and the surgeon cannot say as yet whether it is going to be a success or not. But I imagine from their manner that neither of the doctors feels over-confident of the issue, and that your father's life hangs in a very uncertain balance. I 'm thankful you 've arrived. You must have some supper. Take off your hat."

"I have had some supper, thank you, mother," said Gret quietly. "Lizzie gave me some. But I quite forgot that I still had my hat on."

Accustomed as she was to Gret's deliberate, business-like ways, Mrs. Silway looked at the girl half in amusement. Gret returned the gaze, not amused, but critical.

"You look very tired, mother."

"I had rather a tiring time before the nurse came," said Mrs. Silway.

"Does she stay with father all the time now, then?"

"Oh, of course. Since the operation he is not left a minute. And no one is allowed to see him. I don't imagine," thoughtfully, "that they would allow even you to see him to-night."

"Oh, I can see him to-morrow, perhaps," said Gret calmly.

Mrs. Silway winced ever so slightly at the calm words, although she appreciated the utter lack of hypocrisy that prompted them.

"He has inquired for you several times," she said rather gently.

"Has he?" Gret looked surprised. "What for?"

The question was not put with any harsh intent. In health her father's inquiries for her had generally meant some protest or complaint, and it did not occur to her that sickness would alter matters very materially.

Mrs. Silway smiled gravely. "If you faced the near possibility of death, Gret, would n't you want all your own people near you?"

Gret reflected the matter impartially for a moment. "I don't know," she said then; "can't quite imagine how it would feel. Still, it seems to me I would n't want them much more than at any other time."

Mrs. Silway started to answer, and then paused. There was nothing in fairness to be said. But it seemed as if there faded out of her heart as utterly superfluous and inopportune the last remnant of that cold resentment stored for years against the man lying up-stairs. Before her, in this stern and uncompromising young intelligence, she saw an ample avenging spirit for all the years of neglect and selfishness endured; and, not being naturally cruel or vindictive, it saddened her a little.

"I suppose Evie 's up-stairs, is n't she, mother?" queried Gret, concluding by her mother's silence that the previous topic was closed.

"I expect so. She is a very nervous child, and has been looking quite worried out these last few days," said Mrs. Silway.

"I think I 'll go and look for her, then," observed Gret; and her mother nodded assent absently.

Gret went quietly up-stairs in search of her sister, and opened very softly the door of her little bedroom. Eva was sitting looking out of the open window, and she languidly turned her head as she heard the door-latch move. When she saw Gret she gave a little cry of surprise, and jumping up ran across to the girl and gave her an affectionate hug. Gret returned the hug with interest, and then held her sister away from her and surveyed her critically. The heavy-lidded eyes drooped in a listless way, and an expression of discouragement or discontent, or both, replaced the well-remembered look of dreamy serenity.

"What 's the matter, Evie?" she demanded. "Are you so scared about father?"

"No," quickly; and then somewhat contritely: "No—I 'm afraid I have n't thought about that as much as I ought. I could n't somehow. I—I—" Her voice trailed off and her eyes wandered over Gret's figure, at first absently and then becoming critical. "Spoilt everything for you, too, has n't it? Just when you were having such a good time. But then, he always did spoil things." The curve of disgust and discontent deepened on her lips.

"Oh, no!" said Gret quietly, but a trifle surprised, "I was coming home soon anyway."

"Shall you—I suppose you won't go back now until you 're married?" Gret shook her head.

"How soon will that be?" demanded Eva.

Gret shook her head again. "Can't tell, of course. If father gets well it might be quite soon. If not—" She lifted her eyebrows slightly in token of her inability to judge.

Eva sat down in her seat by the window again, and looked out into the night for a moment. Then, with an effort, she seemed to banish whatever discontent was assailing her. She turned back to Gret and stretched out her hand affectionately.

"Come and sit down, Grettie dear, and tell me all about the lovely time you 've had, and how you came to get engaged."

"Oh, there is n't much to tell about that," said Gret, with a slight laugh. She knew that to no one in the world could she ever voice one word of the tenderness that was in her. "But I want you to tell me how it is you did n't write when I told you about it."

Eva colored unmistakably. "I—I meant to, Gret. I wanted to. I would have—pretty soon." She glanced deprecatingly at her sister for a moment as that young woman sat on the edge of the bed and gazed at her in an open perplexity that was almost comical, and then looked moodily out of the window again.

Presently she turned her head back, her eyes wandering once more appraisingly over Gret's attire. "You 'll be a great lady, won't you?" she said musingly. "I think you 'll look it, too. I did think you never could dress up and be stylish, but I see you can. Well!" She smiled up into Gret's face. "If you love him it 's all right—though I 'd hate to be a society woman. I just want a quiet home with—with the man I want."

Gret nodded, a faint smile on her lips. She quite believed the sincerity of Eva's sentiments; but she could not help giving just a stray thought to the quiet home that Eva would keep, unless she had servants to keep it.

"Come along; sit down, Gret," commanded Eva again, giving an inviting pat to the little old rocker that had been her childhood's delight. "Or are you going downstairs again?"

"No—yes," replied Gret. "I did n't say good-night to mother or anything. But I 'm not going to stay down long."

"All right, then. Go on and say good-night, and then we 'll go to bed, shall we? We can talk real comfy in bed."

Gret took off the long-forgotten hat and threw it on the bed; then she went out of the room. As she walked down the staircase she was in a brown study. Something was evidently on Eva's mind and something quite considerable, too. Then impatiently she shook off her disquieting thought. If she was going to know she was going to know, and puzzling beforehand was waste of trouble. Gret was a born conserver of forces; she never climbed stiles until she came to them.

Her face was quite composed again as she entered the room where her mother still sat. "I think I shall go to bed, mother," she said quietly.

"Yes; I expect you are tired," agreed Mrs. Silway. "I am going to lie down myself for a while."

"Lie down!" repeated Gret. "Sha'n't you go to bed?"

"No; I might be called."

"Oh! Might father be taken suddenly worse, then?" inquired Gret.

"If he does n't take a turn for the better very soon, he will certainly get worse."

"Where 's the doctor?" inquired Gret, suddenly recollecting.

"The operating doctor—the surgeon—went back to Portland this afternoon," explained Mrs. Silway. "He had too many critical cases on hand for it to be possible

to stay here. Dr. Gray can do all that it is possible, or that there is left, to do now, I imagine—and the nurse.”

“Oh, I see,” nodded Gret. “Well, mother, go and try to have a good rest now. You look so tired.”

“I am going to try,” replied her mother, pleased somewhat at the unwonted exhibition of solicitude. Old as Gret was, her mother had not yet recognized one of her main characteristics: she could not bear to see pain or suffering; it was the weak spot in her armor.

Then Gret went back up-stairs to Eva, who was busy setting out such things as her sister would need for the night.

“The nurse has got your room,” she explained; “but I took all your things out before she went in—most of them, anyway.”

The two girls climbed into bed; and then after a while Eva became more of her old, dreamy self. She tried to penetrate into the heart of the older girl, that she might taste some of the delight it must surely contain.

“Gret, are you very happy?” she queried, nestling up to the slim figure that lay in utter repose beside her.

“Yes,” responded Gret quietly.

“Did you—I never guessed you—you liked him,” went on Eva. “Did you like him all the time really?”

“Yes,” said Gret again.

“From the very first time?” insisted Eva.

Gret thought, with a smile on her lips in the darkness, of that first time in the early summer morning in the woods by the river, when a man with cold, quiet eyes had looked her over and passed on. “Yes,” she responded softly.

“You know I never can imagine you loving—really loving,” observed Eva with sweet candor. “Do you think you do really love?”

“Yes, I think so,” replied Gret, amused.

"Do you sit down and think that after a little while you will be with him all the time—all the time?"

"Yes, I have thought of that," guardedly.

"Oh, Gret, if you really love you 're happy!" went on Eva earnestly. "In all your life you 'll never be so happy as you are just now. Think of it, and think of it, and think of it, so that you 'll have it in your memory for always. When you go to sleep at night think of it, soft and warm next your heart, and sleep will be a great dusk-valley full of sweet whispers; when you wake in the morning, think of it, and consciousness will come like a flood of gold, like the dawn's light over the waiting mountains. Oh, Gret, don't let any of the delight slip by, for it will never come again—never just the same again." Her voice, which had been beautiful with lingering cadences, died softly into a whisper. The invocation of one heart to another was ended.

Gret lay still; but her heart approved in silence the passion-laden words of the younger girl. And Eva herself lapsed into silence, staring into the darkness with the wide, soft eyes of youth and mystery. Carried away by her own earnestness, she forgot Gret and her still unfathomed love-story, and following after the wild, sweet fancies of her own heart, she presently wandered asleep.

But Gret lay awake—a thing unusual with her. The movement of travel was still before her eyes, and her brain thronged with thoughts. She thought of her father's illness and its probable outcome, of the life she had just left and the life in store for her. She thought of Eva and her love dreams. She wondered if love could ever be the same thing to them both—they who were so different; or if Eva would ever find any one to love as she loved Errol. No; there was never another like Errol.

Sometimes the thought would creep in, just for a moment, that there would always be the faint possibility of

Errol's discovering that fool child's prank of long ago. It was a prank, pure and simple; and yet, if she had let it, it would have been sufficient to spoil her life. But she would always put the thought away. It was no use dwelling on it. If the risk had been twenty times bigger than it was, she would have taken it. Even if she were found out and repudiated and her heart broken, she would still have known what it was to be Errol Ludlowe's wife. Better that than never to have known.

And so she thought, lying staring into the darkness. Through the open window came the sleepy, incessant murmur of the river, and the sound of a fitful wind that, passing through the pines like the rush of myriad wings, died away in soft flutterings, leaving more silent than before the silence of the night in the great forests.

Very early in the morning, perhaps about five o'clock, while the darkness was as yet unpierced by a single ray of dawn, Gret rose stealthily up from a sleepless couch. She lighted the lamp and turned it down to a mere flicker, glancing cautiously at the peacefully sleeping Eva. Eva was always the heavy sleeper, and it would be an easy matter to dress without waking her.

Gret noticed her little old trunk standing in one corner of the room, and, looking in, found, as she expected, most of her old clothes. She routed out the short blue skirt, the loose tan coat, and the little round cap, and when they were on smiled almost amusedly and gave a queer little wriggle, testing the utter freedom of her attire. Then she turned out the light, and went noiselessly out of the window and down the lean-to roof. She stood on the bluff for a minute or so, accustoming her eyes to the darkness and sniffing in the fresh dawn breeze that was sifting a hundred sweet odors through the forest. Then she went down to the landing, felt about for the boat and stepped quietly in. She floated her oar for a moment

to judge of the state of the tide, whether it would bear her down to or away from the camp-landing. It was about at a standstill, and so she rowed softly downstream. She made the landing with the ease of long familiarity, tied up the boat, and felt her way up the steps that the high-tide made almost horizontal. She felt her way with care along the board-walk, too; for, on the one side, a drop off onto the marsh at this season of the year would be a damp and unpleasant affair, and on the other side a drop into the slough had to be considered.

At the end of the walk she groped about for the donkey that stood at the head of the slough, and found it, reflecting that it must be very early, for Chester was not yet down to get up steam. From the donkey she made her way up by the side of the skid-road. It was muddy, and Gret regretted the darkness that made the skid impossible. Soon, out of the darkness shone two twinkling lights, and Gret smiled with satisfaction. One would be Joe, the Dago flunky, lighting the big stove, arranging the tables and sweeping out, and the other would proclaim the presence of Jake and Charlie in the kitchen.

As she came close to the buildings she found her conjectures mainly right. Joe was noisily depositing an armful of wood behind the big heater, and Jake was bustling about the kitchen. In the corner Charlie was beating hot cake batter. The bunk-house was as yet silent and invisible in the darkness. Gret silently entered the kitchen. Jake, who was evidently preparing the comfortable breakfast of which he and his assistants always partook before settling down to work, was just cracking with extreme gentleness an egg on the edge of a saucer. Hearing a sound behind him he turned his head, the egg still in his fingers, and catching sight of Gret—her naturally pale face showing white against the darkness behind her—he

gave a yell that might easily have wakened the Seven Sleepers, and the egg flew half-way across the kitchen.

Gret looked from the egg, spattering the floor, to the still staring Jake. "Well, what did you do that for?" she inquired gravely.

"Gracious Peter!" ejaculated Jake, indignant. "Why do you come scaring a fellow like that?"

"How did I know that I should scare you?" demanded Gret. "Supposed you 'd seen me times enough." And then, looking at the still startled and indignant cook, Gret's assumed gravity forsook her, and she laughed in gleeful satisfaction at the success of her dramatic entrance. Then taking up the shovel and a brush she removed the egg—all but a yellow stain—and threw it into the stove. In so doing she noticed the appetizing slices of ham frizzling on the top.

"Put in another big slice for me, Jakey," she said amiably; "and I want two eggs, I 'm awfully hungry."

"When did you come?" inquired Jake.

"Last night."

Jake turned to the ham still on the table and sliced off a generous slice. Then he critically investigated the coffee-pot. That done, he turned his attention to a bowl of eggs standing near and selected therefrom half a dozen of the finest. Charlie came and placed upon the table a bunch of knives and forks and some cups and saucers. Meanwhile Gret sat on the corner of the table after the fashion of time immemorial, and watched proceedings.

"They sent for you in a hurry, did n't they?" inquired Jake.

"Nope."

"They did n't! How 's the boss this morning?"

"I don't know," said Gret truthfully.

"How was he last night, then?" amended Jake, recollecting that the present day was as yet in embryo.

"I don't know that either," said Gret. "I did n't see him."

"Well, I 'll be switched," observed Jake with a grin.

Gret was about to explain further, when Joe entered the kitchen. Catching sight of Gret, he jumped about two feet sideways, and then grinned amiably. Jake observed the movement with a side-glance.

"Never saw such a fellow," he commented with gusto; "I believe he 'd jump at the sight of his own mother."

"Very likely," agreed Gret promptly; "she 's been dead about ten years."

Jake dished up the ham and eggs, poured coffee, and the three sat down to the white-scrubbed deal table. Jake and Gret and Charlie sat at one end of the table, and Joe and the boy at the other.

"Well, what do you know?" inquired Jake between mouthfuls.

"Very little," replied Gret with becoming modesty.

"Keep your eyes open and you 'll catch on to something pretty soon," said Jake with a prophetic air.

Gret looked sharply at him. "Well, is it something I shall like to catch on to? Because, if it is n't, it had better be!"

"Why?" demanded Jake in surprise, and somewhat inarticulate on account of the ham and eggs.

"Why, because, if it 's something I did n't like, I 'd want to know in time, so I could stop it," explained Gret.

"Think you can stop anything, don't you?" chuckled Jake. "Wonder you don't want to stop the sun sometimes."

"Well, if it has anything to do with me," said Gret. "If not, it does n't matter whether I notice it or not."

Jake reflected a little as he proceeded with his breakfast. "Oh, I don't think you 'd object any," he observed judicially.

"Well, perhaps it 's none of my business," hazarded Gret.

"Not such a great lot, I suppose," replied Jake.

"Then I sha'n't object," said Gret, calmly concluding the subject.

Jake, however, continued to gaze reflectively at her the while he sipped his final cup of coffee. Apparently he was not quite so confident of her indifference on the matter. But then, his eyes happening to catch the clock, which indicated that it only wanted five minutes to six, he sprang up, followed by the others; and in the bustle of mush-making, and the preparations for breakfast in general, the subject was forgotten.

After Joe had clanged the "quarter-to" bell, and lighted the lamps in the dining-hall, Gret took up her seat well behind the cook-house door. She did not want the men to see her yet, and sat quietly while they turned out with much shouting and much commotion. And not until they were all seated at breakfast, and Joe had taken the mush-kettle round, did she choose to reveal herself. Then she went and stood quietly in the doorway. Oly was the first to catch sight of her, and he gave a little gasp, letting his spoon drop back into his mush-bowl; and Dick Swinton, following Oly's gaze, turned from his position at the head of the table and drew a sharp breath of surprise. There was a moment's silence, and then a chorus of shouts.

"Why, it 's Gret! Hallo, Gret! When did you come?"

"Well, I 'll be sque-jeed if I did n't think you was a ghost for a minute!" said Oly, beaming on Gret with much affection. "I 'm real glad to see you back anyhow."

"Dick was scared, too, were n't you, Dick?" said Gret triumphantly, slipping into a seat by Cassidy's side. "Moved up a little, have n't you?" with a smile up into that good-humored gentleman's countenance.

The faintly perturbed look had hardly faded out of Dick's eyes. "Well, I 'm like Oly," he confessed. "Just for a minute, before I had time to think, I really did take you for a ghost. You looked so queer with the light on your face and the dark behind you."

"What time did you get into camp last night?" inquired Oly.

"About five o'clock—something like that."

"Did you come in on the Tatoosh last night?" inquired Chester, who now, by the way, occupied the exalted position of engineer on the slough donkey. Gret nodded.

"Humph! Bet it was you took my boat."

"Oh, well, there were several boats from the camp down there," said Gret pacifically. "You could easily squeeze into one of the other boats."

"They were all gone before I got there," said Chester.

Gret looked severe. "Should n't be the last of the gang in town *always*."

Chester looked unimpressed. "Had to go all the way to Shearer's and hire a boat."

"Well, you 'd ought to have come along with me when I wanted you to," observed Oly, "'stead of thinking you could bust that slot-machine. He had about two dollars' worth of nickels," went on Oly, for the benefit of the assemblage, "and he swore he 'd beat the stuffing out of Dolan's slot-machine. What time was it," addressing the somewhat sulky Chester, "before you got the last of the nickels in?"

"None of your business," promptly.

"No, you bet it ain't," chuckled Oly tantalizingly. "The business is all Dolan's."

Gret smiled, her head on her hand as she sat looking down the long tables. In comparison with those men of another class so lately left, these men pleased her afresh. It was just dawn, but here was none of the unhealthy

ennui, the boredom, the listless lack of aim, that characterized the early waking hours of society men, but a good-humored zest in life, a healthy power behind all they did, even behind the opinions they held. And Gret scanned contemplatively the bronzed faces, the keen eyes whose glances shot straight out from between level lids, the broad chests and swinging, easily poised bodies, with a smile of renewed affection. Daredevils; improvident; quick to anger, and mostly quick to forgive; generous and good-hearted generally; afraid of nothing, least of all of work and danger; hard to lead, often, and impossible to drive, always—but always and at all times *men*.

Gret went up to the grounds after breakfast with the men, and after an hour or so came down on a haul of logs. Preserving her swaying foothold on the rough, quivering side of a log once more, Gret decided once for all that automobiling was flat, tame and unprofitable. She watched the long timbers splash one by one into the slough with all her old delight.

"Fine, are n't they?" to Chester, as the donkey stopped at the conclusion of the operation, and as the watermen jumped, peavies in hand, on the logs and began to roll them away from the head of the slough.

"You bet!" agreed Chester, with critical appreciation. "These is all piling for the Granite Harbor—eighty-five foot, every one of 'em. Just as straight as a die, are n't they? Like to have all those fellows is worth in my pocket."

"About ten dollars apiece, I expect, eh?" surmised Gret, sizing up the length of the log with a businesslike narrowing of the eye. "You see, they 're not so very thick; only long."

"That 's right. Not so many feet in them," nodded Chester, "but they 're worth more a foot because they have to be all picked just so. There 's six hundred and

fifty of them going down. There was n't another camp in the county could supply that many of just this size, I heard," concluded Chester, with becoming pride.

"They got some out of the boom, I suppose?" said Gret.

Chester nodded. "Oh, yes; there 's quite a few gone down already. They did n't have to be delivered all at once."

Gret nodded. Then she sat down quietly by the donkey for a minute or two before starting on her way home. There were many things she would have liked to do; but, little attention as she generally paid to outward appearances, she felt that, seeing her late arrival the night before and the few words accorded to any one save Eva, it would seem more than usually discourteous to absent herself during the first morning at home.

So by and by she went down to the landing and untied her boat. She stepped in and pushed off, and then paused. The tide was running in swiftly and would carry her up in any case, and moreover she thought she caught the sound of a boat coming round the curve. She listened, and then was quite sure that the boat was coming toward her. She would stay and see who it was—in all probability, Robin. She waited until the boat came in sight and she saw she was right; then she turned sharply upward her own boat, which was drifting out into mid-stream.

She was borne silently and swiftly up to meet the oncoming boat, and Robin, looking up, suddenly caught sight of her. To Gret's surprise and amusement, even at that little distance she saw that he colored a fiery red. He drew in his oars, and the impetus of the boat died away, as Gret's swung close.

"Hallo, Gret!" He still looked uncomfortable. "You startled me."

"I should think so," drily, her old love of teasing her one-time companion returning to her. "Getting quite a bashful young man, are n't you?"

"Oh, no," with a short laugh. "When did you come, Gret?"

"Last night."

"Where have you been now—to the camp?"

"Yes."

Robin looked the girl over swiftly and keenly. Then he looked past her and down the stream. "How long are you going to stay, Gret?"

"How can I tell?"

"Well, I mean—you 're not going away again until you get married, are you?"

"No."

"How long will that be?"

Gret broke into a rippling laugh. "My, what a hurry you all seem to be in to get me away again."

Robin looked startled. "Why?" he demanded quickly.

"Eva asked me the very same thing."

"Oh!" He looked searchingly at her. "Oh, well, I suppose we 're all just curious."

"Suppose so."

"How is your father this morning?" asked Robin then.

"I don't know. Have n't seen any one this morning yet. He was about the same last night," said Gret. "Come on down and see."

"Oh, I guess I won't now I 've seen you," said Robin hesitatingly. "I don't suppose there 's any change yet. I 'll come down to-morrow if I don't see you or—or Eva."

"All right," acquiesced Gret, unconcerned. "I must go; I expect it 's getting late."

"Just about half-past nine," said Robin, swinging his boat round up-stream again.

The nurse was just finishing her breakfast as Gret en-

tered the little dining-room. She was rather handsome, and had all the starched immaculateness of a graduate nurse, but Gret found nothing displeasing about her. When she had left the room Mrs. Silway turned to Gret.

"You have been out, have n't you, Gret?"

"Yes, mother; to the camp."

"Eva and I have been allowed to see your father, and you could have done so, too, if you had been here. He did n't seem to know us, and so I suppose—"

"Did n't he?" said Gret in surprise.

"No. I thought you did n't realize how grave his illness really is," went on Mrs. Silway, with grave candor. "He took a turn for the worse in the night, or rather, as he does n't rally, time makes matters worse. Dr. Gray won't leave him for a moment. Doctors and nurses are very ambiguous things, but I can see they are very anxious."

Gret nodded, looking at her mother intently. And Mrs. Silway returned the look, in her eyes a certain faint curiosity and almost amusement. She had always admitted to herself that Gret was a stubborn little conundrum. Here she was back with apparent content in her old ways and her old clothes, with no seeming change in the small, unyielding face and the lithe, extraordinarily sinuous body. Mrs. Silway had something to say to the girl, but she knew her better than to make any unjust claims or to appeal to any mock sentiment.

"Gret you are quite old enough and quite sensible enough to understand what I am about to say to you," she began gravely and sweetly. "It seems a terribly unnatural state of affairs that we should be able to preserve such unbroken calm in face of the fact that the life of your father and my husband is suspended by such a slender thread that any hour may snap it. But there is very little sham or observance of convention in this life that we

lead and have been leading for years, and we know that this seeming unnatural state of affairs is but the natural outcome of these same past years. I don't expect or want you, Gret, to act the hypocrite and pretend an affection that you could not feel. But I do want you, for the sake of the respect that should attach to the name of father, to stay at home and be within call until we know definitely whether he is to live or die."

"I will, mother," agreed Gret instantly, admiring afresh her mother's easy and unfailing grace of diction.

"Very well, then," smiled Mrs. Silway. "For better or worse, we shall certainly know to-day. So you won't be caged long, you little wild animal. And now sit down for a few minutes. I want to talk to you about your marriage, or rather, engagement. I have n't even had a chance to congratulate you, let alone ask any questions!"

Gret obeyed, with the faintest possible shade of uneasiness. Somehow she did not care to discuss her coming marriage any more than could be helped with any one. It was a subject too near her heart. And so, though she accepted her mother's congratulations with apparent pleasure, her answers to most of the questions put to her were smiling evasions; and Mrs. Silway presently desisted from her efforts to probe the depth and quality of her daughter's happiness. She realized with a sort of wistfulness that it was too late now to expect the girls to turn to her as confidante. She had held aloof too long; been self-sufficient too long. Something—perhaps her husband's loneliness and abject terror in the face of death, or the sight of the absolute need of human nature, in hours of extremity, of love and sympathy—had awakened the latent womanliness and tenderness that still slept in her breast.

Gret sat on for a minute or so, and then, seeing that her mother did not appear to have anything more to say,

rose and went into the kitchen to forage. Lizzie was outside, gathering in the fruits of that morning's washing, and Gret began to gather a meal together for herself. She drew the kettle forward and put the coffee-pot on to warm. Then she went into the pantry, where Lizzie, entering with a basket of clothes, discovered her.

"What are you doing?" she inquired, though perfectly able to guess.

"Finding something to eat," explained Gret. "I ate breakfast so early up in camp that I 'm hungry again."

"I 'll fix you up something," said Lizzie amiably. She deposited her load of clothes on the table and looked at Gret critically.

"What did you do with all your nice clothes?"

"Left them up-stairs."

"You 'll have to wear that kind all the time when you 're married," observed Lizzie. "When are you going to be married?"

"Don't know. Depends," said Gret shortly. And out of deference to the tone Lizzie desisted from that topic.

Consciousness returned to Walter Silway that night and remained with him till death, or until the coma that preceded death. It can hardly be said that he returned to a merciful consciousness, for it merely ushered back the helpless, unreasoning terror that had seized him when first he realized that death was a near possibility. He was too weak to move, and sinking too fast to try to talk, but his brain was wonderfully clear. He was utterly lonely, horribly afraid, and longing for sympathy, yet knowing that he could justly call on none. It was strange how he longed for that which all his life he had held in cheapest esteem—affection. If loving and anxious ones stood with him and held his hands as he entered that unknown from which he shrank, it would be less awful and he would have more courage. But for once he saw

straight, and knew that not only had he no right to expect love, but also that it would be impossible for them to show any. It could only be pretended, and they were not that kind. How eagerly he had watched his wife when first his real danger had become apparent, and most apparent of all to his own inner consciousness. Somewhere, perhaps, buried down deep, a little of her early tenderness for him might yet remain and awake at the thoughts of losing him. But she was gentle and grave as befitted the occasion, and not even the most hopeful could trace anything more. And he thought of another woman in Portland. *She* would lose no time in installing another in that place which he had occupied, and the thought brought no regret.

He saw the selfishness of an ordinary human life, and his own surpassing the ordinary. That Pleasure he had chased so long turned of a sudden a hideous face, and Duty, discrowned by science and discounted of man, but sweet and holy in the memory of the dying, stood not at his bedside. He had lied to himself all his life, and even succeeded in pretty well believing his own lies; but not now. Now he stood face to face with that Nature of which he himself was a disobedient part.

Several times, when conscious, he had thought of Gret, that odd, uncompromising outcome of this strange tangle. She was hard to deal with, but she had a heart. And she had been tasting pleasure at his expense lately. Perhaps she would care, just a little. If he could only see just one look of anxiety, one glance of affection!

When the Quellish doctor hurried back from a visit to another patient, and after he had administered oxygen and done all possible for the failing patient, he looked down into the fading eyes, so full of dumb appeal and misery, and then spoke aside to the nurse.

"I don't think anything will make much difference

now. We might as well let the family remain with him to the end. I doubt whether he will be conscious again."

The nurse went down to the little sitting-room where the three sat in decorous silence. "Mr. Silway is conscious," she said gently. "But we're afraid it will be for the last time. If you would like to come and sit with him—"

The three rose immediately and filed out with soft step, up into the plain bedroom overlooking the Wishkah. The dying man saw them enter, and his eyes searched their faces eagerly. Mrs. Silway approached the bedside and touched his hand gently; she seated herself beside him, and he looked at her searchingly again. Once she had told him: "There is punishment coming to both of us for duty undone. But I am content to take my share, knowing that you will get yours." Well, he was getting it; but she was not exulting. In her eyes pity was plainly to be seen—no anxiety, no love, but pity. He looked at Gret, and she, too, came and stood by the bedside. She remembered all the lights and beauty and luxury of the big hotel where she had last seen him, and now, in this little, dim room, she looked down on him, in curiosity at first; but, as her father had remembered, she had a heart always quick to pity, and, seeing that hunted look in his eyes, she grew suddenly sorry for him. It must be hard to die when one has lived so pleasant a life.

Eva sat a little aside. She was silent and awed, and a look of pronounced dejection marred the usually dreamy sweetness of her pale, flower-like face.

Presently the sick man made an effort and said something in a whispering, broken voice. The nurse, accustomed to catching broken utterances, hurried and bent over him.

"He wants to see Dick some one," she said, looking round inquiringly.

"Dick Swinton, the foreman!" said Gret quickly. "Yes! I 'll go and get him," with a reassuring nod.

"It 's so dark; take a lantern, Gret," murmured her mother.

Gret nodded and darted from the room. She lighted a lantern in the kitchen, taking it more for the extra speed it would insure than as a safeguard. With it she hastened across the river, and raced up the long boardwalk. Wild things scurried and rustled away in the undergrowth of the marsh, and the slough gave out long gleams where the rays of the lantern caught it. Gret was not too busy to notice these things, though she hurried along as fast as fleet feet could carry her.

She stood in the doorway of the men's hall, that being the first door she reached, and as the men caught sight of her a sudden silence prevailed. Card games and checkers halted for a moment, and Oly's concertina paused with a long wail.

"Where 's Dick?" she demanded.

"In his cabin," chorused a dozen voices. "What do you want him for, Gret?"

But Gret had gone on. A light twinkled from the window of the foreman's cabin, and Gret opened the door and stood inside. Dick was taking a correspondence course in forestry, and was busily writing as Gret entered. She looked sharply and curiously over the paper-bestrewn table, and then into Dick's inquiring eyes.

"Father wants you, Dick; he 's dying."

Dick sprang up, seized his cap, and followed Gret out without a word. Outside the door he took the lantern and held out his hand to the girl, who promptly placed hers within it.

Dick loosed Gret's fingers and wound his arm through hers. In that way they traveled quickly down to the boat. In the boat Gret stood up and held the lantern aloft, while

Dick sent the craft across the stream in great sweeps. In the house she led him up to the sick-room.

He entered, treading gently, hat in hand, and his big, magnificent manhood filled the room. Gret took his hand in her quaint, self-unconscious way and led him to her father. Walter Silway looked slowly up at him, the man of much work and few words, who in his dogged, quiet way followed right as he saw it and claimed as much for his fellow man as for himself. Who can guess at the thoughts of the dying man in those few seconds, or gage in those few seconds' keen self-depreciation the lesson given for use along the devious paths that shrunken soul had yet to tread.

Then "the timber boss" began to speak, and Gret touched the arm of the waiting foreman. "You 'll have to bend down, Dick."

Dick bent obediently over and listened to the slowly uttered but fairly distinct words.

"Dick, you 'll run the camp for Mrs. Silway?"

"Yes, sir; just the same as I ran it for you."

"There 's not much else, and you must manage it well for them."

"I will, sir—as long as ever Mrs. Silway wants me."

"You 'll have to move camp soon?"

"About a year; soon as that S. E. section is cut."

Silway seemed to nod his head slightly. There seemed to be nothing else to say, and he closed his eyes, weary with even that little exertion.

Dick stood waiting for a moment or so, then as the boss opened his eyes again, he placed a great, strong hand over his. "Good-by, sir."

His voice was faintly husky. There was much about the boss that Dick had never admired, but he was touched by the sight of so much weakness. And Silway, hungering for sympathy, saw the emotion and strove to speak

again. His lips moved, and then he closed his eyes again. Dick quietly left the room.

Gret, who had been standing most keenly watching both her father and Dick, stood a moment by the bedside deep in thought. Probably in after life she never forgot the contrast between those two. Then she moved quietly away and seated herself by her mother.

Before dawn, with rain falling softly and the dawn-wind stirring through the forest in long whispers, like waves breaking on far-off shores, Walter Silway ceased to breathe.

CHAPTER XXI

GRET HEARS NEWS

CHRISTMAS came and went unnoticed. On account of the boss's recent death no celebrations of any kind were held at the camp, except such individual celebrations as the different camp-members went down to the Harbor to secure, and in the little house on the bluff the time was spent in decorous quiet. Even the energetic Gret, observing her mother's wishes, remained in entire seclusion for the first month following her father's death.

It was rather hard work, for there was nothing to be done but remain indoors. The state of the weather did not permit of even sitting about outside. Fortunately for her, however, Gret was probably more restfully inclined now than she had ever been in her life: for once she could sit down and let the all-engrossing To-day pale before the beauty of that To-morrow which was drawing near. If nothing had ever come of it—as in the beginning she had never dreamed there could—Gret would have sternly repressed her love and scorned herself for loving, would never have allowed herself to dwell on it for even a moment's dreaming; but now that its existence was sanctioned and justified it rose and flooded all her life. Every fiber of the girl's being, every characteristic, was subservient to it. With her nothing like it had ever been before; it was too entire for anything like it ever to be again; for it was one of the attributes of Errol Ludlowe's powerful individuality that the love he inspired

was never anything but complete and all-mastering. More than one woman had loved him so.

During her seclusion Gret received several letters from her fiancé. He told her of summoning home from the Mediterranean the yacht *Immortalité*, and of improvements and overhauling to be made. Though he said nothing, Gret gathered that he shared her mother's ideas as to the propriety of a period of seclusion for the family.

Representing through her attorney that the unbroken continuance of work in the camp was necessary to the welfare of the estate, Margaret Silway obtained from the court an order to that effect, pending probate formalities and while arranging to have herself declared administratrix.

She sent for Dick and had quite a long talk with him.

"The work of the camp will go on as it always has," she told him. "Of course, I don't need to tell you that I know nothing of the logging business; but—" and she smiled—"I don't know that that will make much difference. Mr. Silway always left everything to you, and so shall I. I want you to take entire management of everything. You will do that, won't you?"

"Yes, ma'am." Dick sat facing her, cap in hand, very respectful, but not at all embarrassed. "Just as long as you want me."

"Thank you. I think I 'm so fortunate in having a manager like you," went on Mrs. Silway, really thinking and meaning what she said. "I know how Mr. Silway trusted you, and I know he was not mistaken."

Dick said, "Thank you," and waited for whatever else she might have to say.

"But I imagine there will be a great deal more work now for you to do," continued Mrs. Silway. "I suppose Mr. Silway did most of the selling in Portland. What do

you propose? Shall we open a sort of office affair down at the Harbor?"

"I don't think that will be necessary." Dick smiled gravely. "I 'd just have a box number down at Quellish for the company letters to come to. There is n't much selling to be done as far as the camp's concerned. The mills take about all we can log."

"Did they always do that?" Mrs. Silway looked puzzled.

"Yes, ma'am. In Portland and such places Mr. Silway was engaged mostly in timber deals, not so much with the actual logging."

Mrs. Silway still looked unenlightened, and Dick went on: "He 'd buy up timber claims, and so on. They 'd locate a good timber tract, and then hire men to go out and file on it."

"But—is that legal?" inquired Mrs. Silway.

"Well, no—not exactly. There 's lots of money in it, though, and almost all the big lumber people manage things that way."

"Oh, well, we won't dabble in that branch of the lumber business, Mr. Swinton," said Mrs. Silway, smiling. "The camp will keep us all very comfortably, I think. There is a lot of timber yet uncut belonging to us, I see."

"Oh, yes; two years' work yet. And by that time we shall have bought more." Dick rose, considering the interview at an end. He stood facing his future mistress for a moment. "I was thinking it would be a good thing, perhaps, to send out at once a letter to all our regular customers, saying the camp was still doing business in the same old way. They might think that after—"

"Yes, that is a good idea, Mr. Swinton," agreed Mrs. Silway readily. "I will speak to the attorney at once about drafting the letter and having it sent round. I want all the customers to know that the camp still has the

same manager, too. I 've no doubt they were well satisfied with the treatment they received in the past. And then, Mr. Swinton," she went on, half hesitating, "I don't know what Mr. Silway paid you, but it must be more now because there will be more work and more responsibility. We will alter it to whatever you think fair."

"He paid me a hundred and fifty a month," replied Dick; "and that 's fair. There won't be any more work that I can see. I don't want to talk about raising salary now, anyhow, ma'am. Thank you just the same."

And so, with mutual confidence, employer and employe parted, Mrs. Silway feeling, as she had said, fortunate in having such a man as Dick Swinton to manage for her. She knew well enough that, were it not for him, she would have to sell the camp from sheer inability to run it.

February came in, a beautiful month. There were days of warm sunshine and soft, sweet airs, and Gret began slowly to emerge from total obscurity. She went up to the camp, and now and again up or down the river; and every day while the nice weather lasted she and Eva sat out on the bluff, just as of old; and often Robin came and sat with them.

Gret felt not a little curious about Robin. She had been surprised, to begin with, to find him still at the Orchards. She questioned him freely, and according to him he had quite got out of the idea of going to Portland and starting up in business; he was going to stay at the Orchards and farm it for all it was worth. And yet it did not seem as if he had any more interest in farming now than ever; what work was done at the Orchards Henry, the hired man, did. Gret could not understand it at all, and one day, up at the camp, she mentioned the matter to Jake. He might have enlightening ideas on the subject.

"It 's so funny," she observed. "He says he 's going to stay on the Orchards and farm. But still he is n't farming. Henry does all that 's done. Robin need n't tell me he 's ever going to like farming, because I know better. He has n't hated it all these years for nothing."

Jake was busily untying the mouth of a flour-sack, and he did not look round as he replied to Gret's observations.

"Oh, well, I expect he 's going to marry and settle down."

Gret laughed long and scornfully. "Pooh! Fancy Robin settling down to anything!"

"Oh, but he 'll have to if he gets married!" declared Jake.

"He might for a month or so—just while it was new," said Gret, not to be convinced. "And besides, who could he marry?"

Jake gave a little chuckle. "Well, land's sake! Don't you think there 's anybody left for him to marry?"

"No; not here."

"Nobody?" persisted Jake.

"Oh, well, not about here," explained Gret. "Of course, there are girls—down at the Harbor; but I don't think he 's after any one. If so, he 'd be down there every minute of the time—until he got her. And then I 'd be sorry for her."

Jake looked hard at Gret over his shoulder for a second. "Oh, I don't know. That Orchards is a pretty nice place. I 'll tell you, many a girl starts married life with less."

"Oh, yes; that 's all right. But how long would he have it?" said Gret. "You know Robin as well as I do; so why do you talk rubbish? You know just as well as I do that as soon as ever the newness of marriage has worn off he 'll begin to think how much nicer it would be to live in a town and have a business. He thinks there 's no

work about business, and then one can go to a theater every night. So he 'd sell the ranch. Then you know how long a business will last when you have some one else to do the work for you and attend to it for you. It would be only a matter of time until he lost it. Then it would be a real case of working, and how do you think the wife would come off?" Out of her intimate knowledge of Robin's character Gret ran off her prophecies with great ease.

"It does n't sound to me," observed Jake, reaching out for a spoon, "as if you 'd altogether want anybody belonging to you to marry Robin."

"I would n't; I would n't have it!"

Jake turned to the sack of flour and dug a spoon in with almost unnecessary vigor. He was preparing the noon meal, and carried a heaping spoon of flour to the range and deposited it in the sizzling pan waiting for it. That done, he poured in a lot of water, and stood ruminating a while amid clouds of savory steam. Then he pushed the pan to one side of the stove, and turned to Gret with stolid countenance.

"Well, Gret, we 've always been good tillicums, and that 's why I 'm in such a corner now. But I 'm no spoilsport, and—land! I 'm surprised you have n't taken a tumble before this." He turned back to the stove with smothered grumblings.

Gret stared at him.

"Have n't you never seen Robin talking to a girl?" demanded Jake from the stove then.

"No," said Gret, surprised, but decided.

"Think again!" commanded Jake.

Gret stared harder at him, her eyes opening wide. Could he—"Well, he 's talked to me, of course," she said tartly.

"Oh, of course!" Jake shrugged his shoulders impa-

tiently. "But I mean some girl he 'd be at all likely to get stuck on."

Even in the midst of her wondering Gret's lips curved in slight amusement, so complimentary was this reply to herself; but she thought earnestly. "Nope; never saw him talk to anybody but me and Eva. *You can't mean Eva!*" she added suddenly.

But Jake gave an almost ferocious wave of both hands. "Now, I 'm not saying anything is or is n't. You 're generally pretty smart at putting two and two together and making five. You 've just got to do your own guessing."

It did not take Gret two seconds to recall the many times she had seen Eva and Robin in close converse together and thought nothing of it, and now that she came to look for incidents pointing this way it did not take her long to recall many other things, too—things at the time totally insignificant. She got suddenly up and walked straight out of the cook-house.

Jake watched her straight and rapid progress down the skid-road with a slight smile. In this case he surmised that her putting of two and two together would resolve itself into marching home as straight as an arrow and demanding the truth from either Eva or Robin.

And he was right. With hardly a glance to right or left, Gret went swiftly home—across the river, into the house, and straight up into Eva's room. Eva was sitting writing, her pad on a book that lay on her crossed knees, and she looked hastily up as Gret unceremoniously entered.

"Eva," began Gret, dispensing with preliminaries, as she always did, "what 's this I hear about you and Robin?"

A wave of color rushed over Eva's delicate face. She threw down book and pad and jumped up.

"Did some one tell you? I'm so glad! I wanted you to know all the time, really; though I was n't going to tell, just because we wanted it to be a surprise!" she added quickly, in response to the strange look that settled on Gret's face. "Don't look like that, Gret. Indeed, that was the only reason I did n't tell you!" She put her hands on her sister's shoulders in her eagerness to be believed. "And that's why I did n't write. We were going to be married, and then walk in on you while you were in San Francisco and give you a great surprise. But just then father became ill. . . . Gret, are you so angry?" taking down her hands and stepping back.

"No," said Gret quietly, but with a long sigh. "Did mother know of this?"

"No, neither mother nor father. Robin said father would be sure to oppose it beforehand, and afterward opposition would be no good."

Gret nodded. Then she turned away and went to the window. She stood silently looking out, and in a minute or so Eva came up behind her and twined her arm about her waist.

"Oh, Gret, I see you're feeling hurt. It's just because you don't see things in the way we meant them," she said pleadingly. "I wanted to tell you when you came home this time, but Robin said no, the surprise was just as good as ever. Just as soon as you got married, we were going to get married, too, and follow you up. Grettie, you can't think it's because I did n't want you to know! I did think I'd almost rather tell you, but Robin thought it would be such fun!"

Gret turned from the window with a hard little laugh. She recognized Robin's old, familiar touch. Time did not alter him at all.

"No, I'm not angry with you," she said in her quiet way. "You had the right to do as you liked. I'm not

your master." Unconsciously she emphasized the "you." "I 've got something on my mind just now, Eva. Don't let 's talk about it all just now. We will to-night."

And without another look at her sister she went out of the room, and back to the boat. Her first idea was to go straight up to Robin; but then she changed her mind. She recognized the need of an hour's quiet thought. Just now she was stupid, chilled by something sinister. She could not seem to see with her usual clearness. She could not quite see yet where she stood, what it all meant. So she rowed up the river a little way, and then tied up her boat and went a short distance into the brush. She flung herself down, laying her cheek hard on the moss as she had been used to do at night-time when she wanted to hear the rustling and whispers come through the brush.

One thing had been instantly clear to Gret. Everything between Robin and Eva must be cut short at once. In common with most natures of her class, Gret knew little and cared less for the laws of men or communities; she would cheerfully have disobeyed every one if her sense of expediency advised it. But here she was confronted by the great "Thou shalt not!" planted in every human nature, to disobey which is death of the worst form. She was amazed at the strength of this command born of herself. This thing could not be allowed to go on. She knew it. That was all.

But for quite the first time in her life Gret was frightened, sick at heart. She did not care for the risk of exposure, or the censure of her fellows; she did not even think of it. But she felt that the ax was laid at the root of her happiness. Manage things as best she might, a curtain was drawing slowly between her and her happiness. At best it was now afar off where before it had been so near.

How Gret hated Robin as she lay on the grass and

thought and thought! If only he could have got Eva safely married, how helpless she would have been. Her long disgust at his fickle nature, his folly and innate deceit condensed into hatred that would hardly be contained. If through him she lost Errol, then there would be nothing left to live for, and— Gret's eyes glowed in the shade. Most assuredly Robin would pay for his sins until the last faint stain was wiped out.

And yet, consumed with rage against him as she was, Gret strove to be fair: she had been raised among men who loved fair play. She recognized that she did not seem to be willing to allow Robin the same latitude that she took herself. She realized that she must argue with him fairly, showing him that what stood between him and Eva must be removed before he could try to claim her; and this not from any love of dictating on her part, but simply because it must be. Of course, he must know all this as well as she did, but she must talk fairly and get him to admit it. They would think things over, and she would do the best she could for both of them—and for herself, too. But she knew Robin and his red-hot temper, and her heart sank; and at the thought of losing Errol she grew strangely weak.

Calmer and clearer in mind, but yet leaving much to the chance fall of words, Gret got back into the boat and rowed down to the Orchards. Her oars lagged; she was taking the first step into trouble that stretched farther than she could see. Now and again, just for a moment, the temptation was strong upon her to row on by and let things take their course. How could she risk letting Errol know? How could she risk being put away by him? It would be so easy to let things go—so safe! For then Robin's lips would be safely sealed forever. Yet she rowed on; she dared not stop. Gret had never before known what it was not to dare; now she knew. She had

never before realized what sin was; now she knew she was tempted by it.

Robin was sitting on the veranda-steps as Gret moored at the landing, and he watched her, at first curiously and then with apprehension, as she approached him up the path edged with currant and gooseberry bushes. The brilliant winter sunshine was behind and cast a great shadow before her, and it seemed to Robin that the girl loomed supernaturally large. Her eyes, that rested on his face, glowed with contained passion, and as she drew the deep, silent breaths that made her thin nostrils quiver, Robin felt oddly that he would not be surprised to see her break out in flame at every point of the lithe body. So great was the power of her repressed rage that it seemed as if all create surroundings faded away, leaving her dominating the entire horizon—a stern figure, in an unnatural light, and full of a living fire.

"Robin," she began very quietly, "I 've heard about you and Eva."

Robin's lips parted to speak, but no word came. Instead, his eyes were glued to her face and he waited breathlessly for her next words.

"You know very well," went on Gret, "that it won't do."

Expectation faded instantly out of Robin's face. The familiar dull red of his temper crept over it, and his eyes flashed. "Why not?" he demanded.

"You know why not."

"I don't! You bet I don't! You 're going to get married, are n't you?" His voice rose, as usual with him when crossed or excited. To Gret it was all so hatefully familiar.

"I was, yes; but not to any one belonging to you."

"Would n't have cared if it had been!" contemptuously.

"Perhaps not. It would have been a man, for one thing, and it would n't hurt a man so much," said Gret.

"And so you think you can get married, and do just as you like," went on Robin excitedly; "but if I try to do the same thing, it's all wrong, eh?"

"Don't talk so like a kid," said Gret, forcing herself to retain her temper that she might reason with him. "If it had been any other girl than Eva I would n't have taken any notice. It would have been wrong just the same, but I should n't have bothered; I should n't have thought it was any of my business. We had decided to let that—that foolishness go as nothing. But I can't let you—pretend to marry Eva. What would she be afterwards?"

"What you'll be when you marry that swell of yours," retorted Robin coarsely.

Gret's lips hardened into a thin line. But she still kept a hold on her temper. "Yes, just the same; but I know—I *choose* to pay that price. *She* can't choose, because she does n't know. And," she added in a quiet, measured way, "I would n't let her choose as *I* did if she wanted to." She spoke in a hushed sort of voice, for the truth of what she said came to her even as she spoke.

"Indeed!" sneered Robin. "Nice to be able to say what people shall do, is n't it?" He was in too great a temper to think for himself or make an initiative remark.

A look of weary disgust passed over Gret's face, but she was still wonderfully contained and patient. She kept ever in her mind her own share of blame in the matter.

"I don't see why we should n't gradually work round to the right way of doing things," she said, ignoring his remark. "There must be a way of undoing what we did; though I suppose it would take time. I don't understand much about that sort of thing. But we'll all three get together and talk—"

But Robin interrupted her with a shout. "You won't tell Eva!" He sprang up and stood before Gret, a big,

broad-shouldered man, but senseless in his passion as a spoiled child. "Think I 'll have her know what I was going to let her do? No! I 'd never marry her if she knew that. She 'd have it in for me always. Don't you dare tell her. If you do—" He actually shook his fist in the girl's face, so great was his rage.

Gret looked at him in measureless disgust. For a moment she was silent, at a loss for the most advisable argument to pursue with a man in a state of mind like this. Then suddenly an idea occurred to her. Very likely she had been foolish to come to him at all in the first place. She should have gone to Eva. Eva would have been much more easily pacified, would certainly be more gentle and reasonable, and then she could have helped pacify Robin. Gret had little fear but that Eva could be talked into a reasonable frame of mind, though she had her doubts as to whether she would want afterward to have much more to do with Robin. Still, she would explain everything to her, and then Eva, who liked him, could talk to this man so much better than Gret herself, who hated him.

Having decided this without troubling to explain to Robin, she turned quietly round and began to walk down the path.

"Are you going to tell Eva?" called Robin sharply after her.

"Oh, yes; I 'll have to tell her anyway!" called Gret in reply, but without pausing or turning her head. "If I did n't you 'd manage to do something underhanded that I could n't undo."

Robin shouted something else after her, but his voice was choked with rage, and Gret did not catch what it was. But it did not matter. It was not the least use trying to talk to him until he had had time to get over his first fit of rage. And so Gret went quietly on down the path and

got into the boat. As she sat down and began to row off she saw Robin tear into the house. She reflected that perhaps he was going to follow her down home, but the reflection did not worry her. He would have to be more circumspect in his bearing there.

He did not attempt to follow her, however. And Gret went quietly home and sat down to a dinner that for once she could only pretend to eat. From time to time she glanced at Eva. Her heart was tender toward the girl who also was soon to be robbed of her brief happiness. But in the midst of all her trouble she did not look back and repine or reproach herself. She had done what she thought best at the time, and she had always done that; no more, no less.

During the meal both Eva and her mother glanced time and again at Gret. Her face was composed, but there was a weightiness about her expression, a frozen look about her eyes that had never been there before. Eva glanced apprehensively and penitently, and her mother curiously. But Mrs. Silway never invited her daughters' confidences; she had neglected to do so as children, now that they were grown-up and initiative beings, she would not.

After dinner, instead of going out to the bluff, Gret went up to her room. She knew that Eva the penitent would follow her, as she did.

"Gret, I do think you're unkind to be so cross. I can't see that I've done anything—"

Gret turned suddenly round from the window, and held up her hand. To be dramatic was the last effect she aimed at; but at this moment she was.

"Eva, wait a minute! When you promised to marry Robin, were n't you ever afraid he might already be married to some one else?"

Eva started and stared at her sister, then she laughed;

puzzled as she was, she could not but be amused at such an odd, uncalled-for question. "Why, of course not! Who could he have married?"

Gret smiled, a faint, grim smile. "He could have married me!" And then, cutting short the answer already on Eva's lips, she added, "And he did."

CHAPTER XXII

TOO LATE!

IT seemed to Gret that, after all, most human beings are undiscovered mines. Well as she thought she knew her sister, yet, after her lover's intended treachery was made known to her, Eva acted in a way Gret would never have expected or imagined. At first, of course, in view of Gret's own proposed marriage and all other attendant circumstances, she refused to believe Gret's few and quiet words. But when convinced, the first feelings that seemed to be inspired by the amazing truth was jealousy and a distinct feeling of spite against Gret. It seemed to the astounded elder girl that the knowledge of the wrong Robin had intended doing her was insignificant to Eva beside the fact that Gret had superseded her in her choice of a lover. She wept stormily and unabatedly.

"I don't care!" she sobbed out, lying on the bed in her abandon. "You may have got him, but he does n't love you. I 'm the one he loves!"

"Of course," said Gret contemptuously; "he hates me as badly as I do him."

After a while this assurance, repeated in various and more emphatic forms, proved so comforting that Eva's sobs abated somewhat, and she presently sat up on the bed and began to question. She made Gret give her every detail, every circumstance preceding and following that ill-advised day of long ago, which, for that matter, Gret

was quite willing to do. And again Eva was comforted. It never had been anything but a matter of words, and Robin had never really cared for Gret. And Gret made a point of contributing to the relief of her sister's jealousy by declaring often and scornfully that never had the faintest tinge of affection existed between herself and Robin, and never in the future could anything but dislike be felt between them.

And then, hurrying to take advantage of the period of calm following on this comforting assurance, Gret began to discuss remedial measures. She did not know much, if anything, of divorce laws, but she had great faith in the power of money. To-morrow, she told Eva, she would go down to Granite and consult the best of the three lawyers there. She did not deem it advisable to consult the one attorney in Quellish, who was also her mother's attorney.

"It takes six months to get a divorce, though; I know it does," said Eva disconsolately.

"Well! It's better to wait six months than to wait forever, is n't it?" observed Gret almost curtly. She could not but remember that her own fate was very much more uncertain, very much more threatening, than Eva's. But Eva did not think of any of these things. She only saw a long, dreary wait before her, and wept afresh.

Gret sat and quietly waited for her to grow calm again, which after a while she did. The very fact that some one was sitting waiting for her to become quiet had a quelling effect, and so she sat up, dried her eyes, and once more evinced a readiness to discuss the situation.

The two girls talked far into the night—with intermissions caused by fresh outbursts of Eva's grief and disappointment—of the steps to be taken on the difficult path before them. It was agreed that strictest secrecy be preserved between the three; the truth must be kept from

every one, even their mother. And Eva pledged herself as to Robin's compliance with everything she should deem advisable. It pleased her afresh to think that she alone could influence him, a distinction that Gret was perfectly willing to concede. And when, half-way into the night, all was arranged that could possibly be arranged beforehand, the two girls retired to their respective beds—Eva for another fit of crying, and Gret to think and wonder, and alternately hope and despair.

Before she went to sleep Gret thought with fresh amazement of the new side of her character presented by Eva that night. The wrong that to the girl of harsher mold had seemed so heinous she would risk her life's happiness rather than permit it, to the girl of soft and gentle mood was nothing compared to the possible loss of her lover. And even in the midst of her anxiety and trouble Gret wondered. Love was everything. The world was not lost when that yet remained.

The next morning Eva was not able to leave her room for swollen eyes and headache; but she called Gret to her bedside and whispered to her to go and find Robin and tell him that she still loved and would wait for him. And Gret promised, and also promised to come right back and tell Eva what he said. She further proposed to go down to Granite that day and consult the lawyer, but Eva wished to wait until Robin's opinion could be gained on that and other details. And so it was finally agreed that Gret should invite Robin to a conference of three that afternoon or evening. It was certainly not Gret's way to consult with any one before acting, but in this case she deferred to Eva, who seemed to be carefully guarding against any possible slight to Robin.

And so, in obedience to Eva's wishes, and also in accordance with ideas of her own, Gret went up to the Orchards in search of Robin. But she could not find either

him or Henry. The place seemed deserted. She rowed a little way up and down the river, and went up to the camp, but no Robin. So, deciding that he must have gone down to the Harbor, Gret went back home and so explained to the waiting Eva. Eva was worried at once.

"He would n't go away, would he?" she inquired anxiously.

"Why, of course not!" replied Gret scornfully. "Where would he go to?"

That afternoon, while Eva, relieved from her headache, was sleeping a troubled, restless sleep, Gret rowed up the river again. There were no signs of life about the Orchards yet, and so Gret rowed on, more or less aimlessly. She was so harassed and anxious that she could not be still, and she rowed for the mere relief of action. And in this way, not exactly looking for him, but glad nevertheless to find him, Gret met Robin.

Apart from other troubles, just now Robin was much ruffled in spirit over domestic matters. So altogether uncivil and explosive had he been the day before that Henry, the long-suffering, who had been gradually tiring of doing two men's work when he was only hired and paid for one, had decided to settle matters once for all by leaving. And so last night, taking advantage of an evening trip made by his master to the Harbor, Henry had made a sudden exit. Robin had hunted all day, but could find no trace of his missing servitor; and now, with stock at home waiting to be fed and watered and endless work to be done, he was returning, in a most unenviable frame of mind, from a hasty visit of inquiry to the Gradel ranch.

They met in the Jam. The tide had begun to run in, but as yet there was not sufficient water to allow of the width and play of two pairs of oars. The slope of the banks was steep, and what water there was was deep; but there was not yet room for two boats to pass between the

edge of the boom and shallow water, and Robin and Gret, both standing up and paddling gondolier fashion, sheared noses and came to a halt.

In a strictly impersonal voice Gret delivered Eva's message word for word, and ended by requesting his presence on the bluff that evening for the purpose of joint consultation.

Robin was palpably taken aback. Like Gret herself, he had never dreamed but that Eva would look very seriously on the wrong he had been about to do her—so seriously, indeed, that her love for him could never again be the same. And in view of this certainty he had done what, even so soon, he would gladly undo. Yet he would not appear to falter now. He looked at Gret with narrowed eyes.

"You're so busy fixing my affairs. How are you going to fix your own?"

"I'll see when the time comes," replied Gret shortly.

"It'll come very soon," said Robin, with an air of bravado, more assumed than felt. He was victor for the moment, but victory is sometimes dearly bought. "Last night I wrote and told Ludlowe about—who you were."

All the bronze faded out of Gret's eyes, leaving the still, deep sea-water shade. "I don't believe it!" she said with the intake of her breath. "You don't know his address."

"Oh, yes, I do—the St. Francis Hotel," said Robin quickly.

Gret lifted her head for a moment. "Have you posted the letter?"

"Yes; I went down last night and posted it." And then, feeling that a proper show of righteous rage was necessary to the situation, he went on: "You always did think you were too clever for any use—arranging other people's affairs; but there's such a thing as getting too smart. Try and show a little smartness in arranging your

own affairs now. I called after you last night that I'd do it if you told Eva."

Gret did not answer; she did not look at him, and it is doubtful whether she even heard what he said. Robin was prepared to see her get furiously angry—in her quiet way—but he was not prepared for the effect his words had on her. The color ebbed away from her face, even from her lips; and she stood quiet, with bent head. She folded her hands in a quaint way across her breast, and drew one deep, long sigh. Her wide eyes rested on the deep water, and the moving of the boat swayed her body slightly; but her face was set like that of a dead woman.

The river swished and rippled round the boom, and the great trees stood tall and watchful about them. But still Gret stood, with bent head and that strange look on her face. She reminded Robin of a picture he had once seen of a nun taking the vows that consecrated her life. He grew uneasy, and a sense of chill passed over him; his old fear of the girl crept back, for the moment superseding and annulling his ill temper. He was a fool not to have waited a little longer. She could not have taken his trump card away from him, nor even robbed it of any of its power. It would have done just as good work late as early.

Presently Gret looked up, a faint smile creeping over lips that had a hard, twisted look. And again she sighed, that deep, long sigh of finality.

Time is effect. But for its effect upon animate things it would be as nothing. And by this same law our lives are shaped more by moments here and there than by all the years that lie between. In the few moments that had just passed there had opened a wide gulf between Gret and the happy girl treasuring thoughts of her future. So far away was she already from that other girl

with the glad heart that it almost seemed as if she could never have been. And in those few moments Gret forgot her love for Eva, all sense of fairness, all goodness, all hope. She gave herself over to a hate that would be deep enough and bitter enough to fill her days.

"Well!" Her tones were hard and incisive, though quiet. "Then *that* 's all ended. Now I am free. Oh, no, though. Now I," and she laid her hand on her chest with a mocking movement, "am your wife." She looked at Robin smilingly, but his eyelids faltered beneath the wide stare of her eyes. "You shall have no other." She paused, and then repeated her words slowly, "You shall have no other."

"Do you mean you won't—won't try to get a divorce?" demanded Robin. He had never dreamed of such a contingency.

"Never, never!" She laughed. "Why, I have nothing left to live for now but you. You would n't rob me of that, would you? I shall live with you—and you will live with me. And you 'll wish you had never been born."

"I won't!" declared Robin loudly, but dismay mingling with the rage in his eyes, nevertheless. "Would n't live with you a day!"

"What will you do, then?" inquired Gret, almost gently. "You can't sell the Orchards. It 's half mine as your wife, and I 'll never sign. If you go, it will have to be penniless, and then you 'll have to work. Work! Think of it! I don't think you 'll find that that great friend of yours, Cecil, will take half so much interest in you when he finds you have nothing behind you. When probate is settled I shall have some money of my own, but none of it will ever go into your house. If your home yields you a living, it will be of your own making, even to the help you hire to do the work you shirk."

Robin thought a moment, or tried to. "Waugh!" he

cried, trying with a gesture of contempt to throw off the fears that were assailing him. "You're just talking to hear yourself. A man can't be made to live with a woman unless he wants to—need n't tell me!"

"Oh, no," admitted Gret quietly. "You can go away, as I said before. I shall be quite happy in our home without you. Don't you think so?"

Robin did not answer, but he drew his breath in through shut teeth as he stood gazing at the girl before him. His eyes glistened with rage. In her he recognized henceforth the one plague spot of his existence. He knew she spoke in no idle spirit of braggadocio; she never did. She would do all and more than she said. And as it never had occurred to Robin that any trouble which had come to him might be of his own making, so it did not now. He only saw in Gret the presentment of a hateful and boundless spite. And very certain it is that if fervent wishing could slay any one, Gret would have died in her shoes where she stood. Alive, she would always prove his Nemesis; dead—but Robin's mouth turned down with hopeless disgust; there was no such luck as her dying! She was not that kind. She would be there, triumphant, to the end. The only person who might be able to turn her from her avowed purpose would be Eva. Again Robin tried to think to some purpose, and dropped his eyes reflectively to the water.

Gret stood watching him keenly, her boat, forced upward by the incoming tide, nosing gently between Robin's boat and the boom. She noted the varying but equally sinister expressions that chased across his countenance, and smiled. It was her turn now.

"You need not study how to get around things," she observed calmly; "because you can't. Nothing that you can do—now—can prevent me doing what I have said. Don't think you can get at me through Eva, because you

can't. She 'll think I 'm very unkind and all that, I know. But I shall be doing her a better turn than she 'll ever know of in saving her from you. You may succeed in giving me a little trouble; but, dear me, I shall be pining for something to do. And you 'll never get very far ahead of me, because I shall watch every move you make. If I get tired of watching myself, I 'll hire some one to do it. That 's easy—when you have money."

Robin lifted his eyes, though not his head, and looked at her in a strange, quiet way. And then suddenly he gave way to one of those unaccountable impulses by which man is sometimes seized to the making or undoing of his destiny. Most mysterious of all the many mysteries of that unimagined deep, the mind, are these sudden well-springs of action. Possibly with murderous intent, or possibly only in a sudden access of rage, Robin leaned forward and dealt Gret a ringing slap on the face. She must inevitably have been knocked out of the boat but for an unconscious habit, born of her constant practice in balancing, on fallen timber, in boats, and on the skid-road. Even when standing relaxed and in repose, one foot always seemed to be a little behind the other, unconsciously ever ready; and now, though she staggered back the length of the boat, the slim foot had darted out in time, with incredible quickness she had shot back into the bow of the boat and returned the blow with vicious interest. And he, who should have been warned where she was not, did precisely what he had, perhaps, counted on her doing: he staggered and stepped on the side of the boat. It tipped and slid from under him, emptying him gently out. He struck the boom-post a few feet behind him, slid obliquely along it, and vanished into the smooth, dark water.

Gret drew a long, quiet breath and stood triumphant, her nostrils dilated and eyes wide. She watched for him

to rise, a half smile on her lips at the ridiculous figure he would doubtless make when he should appear, spluttering with rage, and dripping with water. He did not appear by the boat, however, and she turned her head. He was evidently too mad to come up near her again, but would land on the boom sills somewhere a little lower down. But a moment went by and she could see no sign of him, and the rage died out of her eyes and amazement took its place. He was a good swimmer and could come up anywhere, but not without her seeing. She gazed up and down and from side to side. No sign. The tide flowed on in uninterrupted smoothness. And then, with a certain quietening of the pulse within her, Gret recognized what had happened. He had struck the boom-post on entering the water and, not recovering himself instantly, had been borne under the boom by the inturned tide. She snatched up an oar and, moving the boat forward, fished under the sills of the boom.

"Robin!" she called. "Robin!"

No answer; no sign. She tried with an oar to move the big logs with which the boom was packed, but could only just faintly stir them. She looked round. None lived within calling distance; and anyway it was too late. The tide would keep him under the boom, and the boom stretched for a mile or more above them.

Gret stood for a moment, the oar still in her hands, taking brief counsel with herself. She had a sense of not being alone. Every tree in that great community towering on each side of her watched and waited with her, breathless and motionless; the river ceased swishing round the boom and stood calm for a moment.

Then she wakened to the situation. She looked up and down the stream once more. Nothing was to be seen save the idly-floating boat and oar and Robin's soft felt hat. Gret lowered her oar into the water and paddled swiftly

out from among them on up the stream past the Jam. Much higher up, long past Gradel's, in a place that she knew, Gret tied the boat up to a willow, climbed out, and vanished into the brush.

Later on, on the shores of the Lake of the Hidden Canoe, Gret sat down and rested. One half the lake was in shadow, and the other half, lighted from a rift in pearl-gray clouds, rippled in glancing beauty. And Gret sat and gazed at it with wide eyes. Though perfectly calm, perfectly mistress of herself, she was yet full of an inward excitement which, when it died down, would probably leave a sense of shock. Perhaps she only had one definite thought as yet—Too late! Too late!

Of Robin and his end Gret thought very little yet. If she had seen him die, seen one death struggle, one agonized look, she would never have forgotten it as long as she lived. But she had seen nothing. He had just calmly and gracefully slid off the earth, which, in her eyes at all events, he burdened. And at present Gret could only think of the terrible tangle so suddenly dissolved, and the dissolution that came too late.

Of course to many women—indeed, perhaps, to all women not brought up as Gret had been—such a calm acceptance of conditions would have been impossible. To a city woman with the usual highly strung nervous system, and the usual mind stored with literature and drama which place the emotions on a scale never intended by nature, a position like Gret's would be fraught with terror. But Gret had grown up with men who dealt with nature and understood and spoke nothing else. The books and dramas unfolded to her were only those of life; her mind had grown and widened on things seen, not on things imagined, and realities have a most matter-of-fact way of educating. She had seen pitiful animal tragedies, as pitiful as anything human, that went un-

mourned; and she saw nature indulge in titanic passions that passed and left no shadow on the blue of heaven.

The more natural the man, the fewer the emotions. Primitive man had few, love and hate being probably the whole gamut. And on the way back to nature all the thousand and one shades of sentiment and emotion, groundless fears and delusive hopes, born of ultra-civilization, are cast aside as hampering baggage for which there is no possible use or place in real life. Gret was not exactly a primitive woman; but she was too splendidly healthy, her nerves were too sound and unassertive, and her mind too matter-of-fact and steady to be troubled with any nightmares born of her own imaginings, or with regrets born of a false conception of things. If she had seen suffering, she would have been haunted by the sight and memory of it. But she had not.

That night, in the men's hall in the camp, some of the men were playing cards and some endeavoring to read. But eight or ten of the younger, lighter spirits, with much thumping and noise, and greatly to the disgust of the card-players and readers, were stepping a barn dance to the gusty, wheezy strains of the "Washington Post" squeezed out of Oly's concertina. Jake, leaning idly against the door-post, his apron on in token that his word was not yet quite finished, felt a light touch on his shoulder. He turned his head, caught sight of Gret, and gave a start.

"Lord, you 're always scaring me!" And then he looked closer at her as if in curiosity. Gret caught the look, and hastened to cut it short. She burst out laughing, and nodded toward the clattering dancers.

"Jake, we can do better than that. Come along!"

Jake accepted the invitation immediately, picked up the corner of his apron, and, taking Gret's hand with a mincing air, stepped into the room to the time of the dance.

As they proceeded, in an artistic combination of cake-walk and barn-dance, they were greeted by a yell from Oly, which for a moment caused the dancers to break time as they paused to stare at the addition to their number. Then with shouts of laughter they fell into the spirit of the thing, and trailed along behind Jake and Gret, who continued on their way with much style and seriousness.

Others hastened to join the dance, and the laughter and fun grew louder; and presently Dick, unassertive, but always watchful, appeared in the doorway. He laughed, too, though it cannot be said that the expression in his eyes was altogether approving as he watched Gret. He placed his hand gently on her shoulder as she paused at last before him, and the girl looked up to meet the puzzled, half wistful glance of the man above her.

"Gret, what are you doing out at this time?"

"Why, it's only about seven o'clock, is n't it?"

"Yes, but it's dark."

"Oh, yes, of course it's dark. I've been up in the woods and only just got back."

"Yes. Some day you'll have been up in the woods and only just not get back at all," prophesied Dick gravely.

"Either that or fall off a raft and get drowned," laughed Gret. Then, with a little conciliatory nod, "I'm going home now, Dickie."

"Yes, I know you are," replied the foreman quietly, reaching for one of the collection of lanterns that stood in the corner of the room; "because I'm going to take you."

CHAPTER XXIII

GOOD-BY

ROBIN START'S body was not recovered, though hard and persistent search was made for it. There was no conjecture as to the manner of his death, for the boat and floating hat in the Jam told its own seeming tale. He had lost his balance poling down the Jam, and had been carried under the boom.

Eva alone did not accept this theory. When first the news of his death became known to her—through Lizzie, the morning following—she rushed wild-eyed to Gret, who was still in her room.

"Robin 's dead! Oh, he 's dead!" she wailed, clasping her hands in a perfect frenzy of despair. "They can only find the boat and his hat. They think he fell out of the boat but I know he did n't. You said terrible things to him and broke my poor boy's heart. I know you did! I saw it by your face. And so you 've killed him! You know you have. I shall always hate you, for I know you killed him!"

Gret looked at the frenzied girl with a startled stare for a moment. It was well she would never know the whole truth. Then pity grew in her eyes. She felt no resentment at the reproach or the threat. Poor Eva! Though her own heart was frozen, it seemed, and would hardly respond any more to pity or fear, yet she knew the terrible, heartrending sense of loss that was upon the younger girl and sympathized with her. At the same

time, Gret was sufficient judge of human nature to divine that Eva's emotions, so intense while they lasted, would for that same reason be of shorter duration. Though she would never realize what kind of a man she had been delivered from, and would mourn as for the gallant lover her heart pictured.

Eva rushed off to join in the fruitless search of the river, and, her state of grief being so pronounced, Gret felt it was necessary to make at once some explanation of it to her mother. Accordingly, when after a few hours Eva returned to the house and rushed like a whirlwind to her room, she sought very briefly to discuss the matter with her as she lay sobbing on the bed.

"Oh, I don't care what you do," she cried bitterly. "I don't care what you tell her."

"Very well, then. I shall just tell her that you were engaged, but that father's sickness prevented you telling her. Afterward you can tell her as much more as you like," said Gret gently.

And with that she left the room, making no effort to comfort or conciliate the grief-ridden girl. It would only worry her and would do no good; for just now Eva was fostering a feeling of bitterness against her sister, a feeling that Gret made no attempt to dispel. She felt that it was unjust, and born to a certain extent of ignorance of the truths underlying the situation, but trying to reason now was worse than useless. By and by, when her grief had calmed down somewhat, she would see things in a clearer light, perhaps. If not— Well! It was like all the rest of the things that could not be helped.

Gret's communication to her mother was brief and matter-of-fact, and Mrs. Silway accepted the information quietly. She was not so greatly surprised, having doubtless noticed Robin and Eva together very frequently, but she was greatly shocked. She asked Gret very few ques-

tions, having made up her mind to wait for her daughters' confidences, should they ever now be disposed to give them. During her husband's death-hours several home-truths had come to Mrs. Silway, one being the simple and unassailable axiom that two wrongs never yet made one right. In her province as mother she had neglected the moral and inward part of her daughters' lives as much as their father had the outward and material. She would not now attempt to force their confidence, nor intrude uninvited into the privacy that seemed to hedge their lives about; but she was gentle and wistful in her manner toward them where before she had been austere.

She went to try and comfort Eva, but found her as yet totally unable to accept comfort or even reason. And, like Gret, Mrs. Silway felt that Eva's grief, though frenzied, almost hysterical at present, was yet of a safe kind. It was spending itself in oceans of tears.

As soon as it was possible to receive a letter from California—indeed, even before—Gret went down to the Harbor every afternoon for letters. None came, and at heart she had hardly expected one; she felt almost sure that Errol would come up himself in answer to such a communication as he had received. And each day she watched the boat into the Harbor. One afternoon he would step ashore from it; and then, in an hour—long before they could get home—this torturing suspense would be over. And yet not suspense in the sense of uncertainty. Gret had no hopes whatever of the outcome of the interview between herself and Errol; she knew beforehand that all was irrevocably lost. Indeed, her own pride could tolerate no compromise such as now remained possible. There could be no confidence, and perhaps but little respect, and when these were gone nothing remained.

She dreaded seeing him, dreaded so much that her heart beat to suffocation at the thought of it; and yet she

was glad she was going to see him once more. It seemed to her that when she had said good-by that last time she had not looked at him long enough or hard enough. This time, before he went away from her, she would follow every line of the proud, serene face, every line of the figure whose careless grace of movement she had watched so often.

Gret had pictured herself as meeting Errol as he stepped from the boat, and had gone over the long row home, with its harsh words spoken courteously and its long silences full of pain. And yet, when at last he arrived, she did not meet him in this manner at all.

Coming home early one sweet, moist evening, when the warm, gray twilight was just beginning to fall, Gret saw as she reached the top of the bluff a familiar figure on the veranda with her mother. Errol sat facing the bluff, and must have seen her immediately, and so Gret could not hesitate even a moment. She drew a long, hard breath, and walked unwaveringly up to the house.

Errol rose to meet her, and held out his hand with a smile. But he did not kiss her, and Gret's greeting was so quiet that Mrs. Silway looked at both in covert wonder.

"I saw the boat come in at the Harbor," said Gret. "How could I have missed you?"

"I came up from Granite on the *J. T. West*," explained Ludlowe. "It was just about to start, and the regular boat had not finished loading. So I preferred the lesser accommodation together with the lesser delay. The *West* docked at one of the mills, and I got a man to bring me up in a sort of tow-boat affair."

Gret nodded; then she sat down on the top step of the veranda and clasped her hands about her knees—clasped them very hard and tight.

"Did you leave all quite well in San Francisco?" she asked.

"Quite, thank you, with the exception of Arthur. He is getting back into as bad a shape as ever," replied Ludlowe.

"He is too good ; that is the trouble with Arthur," said Gret.

"Yes," acquiesced Ludlowe, smiling. "It certainly would seem as if nothing sweet or good could flourish on this terrible old earth. I 've seen that fact demonstrated before. On the other hand—"

"Rank weeds grow strong," concluded Gret drily.

"Well, something like that," agreed Ludlowe with a slight laugh.

"Gret is always so forcible in her modes of expression," observed Mrs. Silway smiling, and rising as she spoke. "If you 'll excuse me, major, I 'll just see about your room."

"No, don't trouble, please, Mrs. Silway," said Ludlowe quickly. "I 'll just turn in with one of the boys down at the mill. I return to Portland to-morrow, I expect ; and I have so many messages to deliver to them. So, later on, if you 'll excuse me, I 'll go down there."

"Why, I 'm sorry you can only pay us such a short visit," said Mrs. Silway in surprise, pausing and looking questioningly at him.

"Oh, don't call it a visit, Mrs. Silway," replied Ludlowe. "Just a call."

"Well, I would like to have you extend the call a little further, then," persisted Mrs. Silway, evidently greatly puzzled. "So far I have seen nothing of you. However, I 'll leave Gret to reason with you. When she has concluded her arguments I hope you will tell me you have decided to stay—a few days, at all events." And with a bend of the head and a smile Mrs. Silway went indoors to see about added preparations for dinner.

Gret sat still on the step, her eyes on the river, taking

no apparent notice of her mother's words. And even when Errol drew his chair a little nearer to her, and threw himself back into it, she did not turn her head until he had been seated fully a minute in waiting silence. Then she glanced quietly at him, in mute expectancy of his opening the conversation, which he, seeing she evidently had no intention, finally did.

"Gret, do you know why I have made this hurried trip to see you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, then you knew when that letter was sent, did you?"

Gret smiled grimly. "No, I did n't know at the time. I knew afterward."

Ludlowe took the letter from one of his pockets, unfolded it, and handed it quietly to her. She took it, merely because he seemed to wish it, and not that she wanted to see so evil a communication. It was short, almost to insolence.

"SIR: Gret Silway is my wife. If you don't believe me, you can see the records in the Montyville court-house.

"ROBIN START."

Gret handed back the letter in silence. And again Ludlowe waited for her to speak. But Gret was storing her courage to answer questions. Herself she had nothing to say.

"Is it true, Gret?" he asked then.

"Yes, it's true."

There was another silence, and Gret could feel his eyes rest on her face. To the west long, yellow bars were rent in the gray, and the amber light of the sunset was full upon her. And Gret was glad of it. The kindly coloring hid the waves of hot red that chased across her face.

When at last Errol spoke it was with a certain finality,

like one who has turned a matter over in his mind and reached and accepted a conclusion.

"Well, Gret, if you yourself had n't told me I would never have believed it. In my eyes your sturdy uprightness was one of your main charms. How could I have been so deceived?"

Gret made no reply. It seemed to her there was nothing to be said. But she unclasped her fingers from round her knees, and resting her elbows on her lap as she bent forward, buried her chin in her hands.

"Were you just going through the experience of being engaged to me, merely for the fun of it?" queried Ludlowe then. "Would you really have gone through the ceremony of marrying me?"

"Yes," replied Gret truthfully.

"And had you considered what it would mean when the truth came out, as it inevitably would sooner or later, for this fellow is not one to keep quiet?" asked Ludlowe in cold, even tones. "Had you thought of the disgrace you would bring on the name I had given you? Had you no thought of the illegitimacy of your children?"

"No," answered Gret with the simple earnestness of truth. "I never did think of all that. I just thought that if I were willing to take the risk, and the punishment if it came, that that was all there was about it. I did n't think that kind of thing ever hurt a man. I did n't see it in the way you put it."

"And you did n't mind deceiving me?" queried Ludlowe.

"I did n't think of it like that," said Gret quickly. "It was just my secret—done with long ago."

"Long ago? When was it—when were you married, then?"

"Oh, long ago—when we were both kids," her eyes growing somber in the twilight. "It was one of Robin's

fool ideas. He wanted to get married—to some one, any one—just because Jack Gradel had got married.”

“And you?” inquired Ludlowe.

“Oh, father was trying to keep me in the house about that time, and I thought I might suddenly need a home where I could do as I liked,” explained Gret. Her tone implied that she was not trying to excuse herself, but since he asked he had a right to know.

“And did you ever live with him, this Robin?”

“Of course not!” with contempt. “We decided that very afternoon that it was all foolishness, and that we’d forget all about it. And so we did. It was only a few words spoken to us—nothing more. A very little thing”—wistfully—“to spoil three lives.”

“A big enough thing to turn right into wrong,” observed Ludlowe.

“So I see.”

“Why, when you decided that nothing could come of such a marriage, did n’t you get a divorce and undo the thing properly?” asked Ludlowe.

Gret smiled faintly. “I did n’t know anything about divorces, or how to get them. Besides—I never thought anything about it one way or another. Robin did n’t bother me. Most of the time I forgot all about him. And then, when you spoke, I was afraid to stir things up for fear—” She paused, and then her lips closed together. What her fears were was sufficiently obvious to both.

“But you took such odds,” went on Ludlowe after a moment, crumpling the letter in his fingers. “If you had even shared your secret with a man. But this fellow—”

“Oh, he would never have bothered me if I had n’t interfered with him,” said Gret with quiet confidence.

“And why did you interfere with him?”

“He was going to marry Eva.”

"Oh!" There was a volume of comprehension in the syllable. Then Ludlowe was silent a moment, considering this new aspect of the case. "And so," he said then, "you could n't allow that?"

"No, of course not."

"You could see the terrible wrong it would be to her," continued Ludlowe. "But you could n't see any wrong to me."

She gave him one glance. Her eyes were so wide and bright with pain that it was like a bronze gleam of light. "I have told you that I did n't see it that way. Until this came up about Eva I never did see things as—as they are. I thought it was just my risk. I never wanted to hurt you; you must know that. And, anyway, after I had married you, I should have understood better. And I would have killed Robin with my own hands before you should have known."

There was no bravado in the quiet laden tones, and Ludlowe knew that. He looked in a puzzled way at the girl sitting near him. He could not altogether feel that she was an adventuress unmasked. There was a certain sad dignity about her that would not be dispelled. She was a strange creature.

"Why were you so determined to take the risk, Gret?" he asked then. "I did n't think you cared for money or position."

"I don't—for either," shortly.

"And yet you were prepared to risk a great deal for them," ironically.

Gret fidgeted on the step. How dense men were. As if she would risk anything for money! A wave of bitterness and exasperation passed over her, and she forgot herself for a second. "Oh, you make me tired!" she said sharply.

There was a cry in her voice that she did not know of,

the cry of a woman hurt past all enduring. Ludlowe caught the sound of it, and when he spoke again it was more gently.

"Shall you ever try to live with this man?"

Gret laughed. "I think not. He's dead."

Ludlowe started violently. He sat upright in the chair, all the veiled indifference characteristic of his manner gone.

"Gret!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "What do you mean? You don't mean that you—"

Gret thought for a moment. She had a great mind to tell him the truth, just to see if she could be hurt any more. But the impulse passed. It would do no good, and her love was disgraced enough as it was.

"He fell out of the boat, and was carried in under the Jam," she explained then with an air of finality.

Ludlowe's lips parted to speak, but he paused. It needed quite an effort to master the impulse to question, to know the truth. But he reflected that it was better not to seek to know. If she had any secret it was better hers. It was better none should share it.

He sat and looked at the girl in a half-troubled way. The small, pale face and wide eyes were full of a sort of proud, subdued tragedy. He was terribly shocked at what she would have done—at what she had done; his confidence in her was destroyed; but there was still something about her that defied his scorn and kept alive that strong feeling of comradeship and affection that he had for her.

"If he had managed to fall out of his boat earlier, it would have been better for all concerned," he said at last, with an air of extreme discontent. "As it is, I feel that, though removed, he has come between us irrevocably. I could never forget what you would have done. I should be afraid—"

But Gret would not listen. She sat upright and held up her hand commandingly.

"No, no! That is all ended. No need to talk about it. It was ended before you came. We have said all we need say now. I suppose you never will know—"

She clasped her hands together in her lap. She was trying hard to dispel the apathy that was descending on her—the apathy born of completion and despair. Soon, in an hour or two now, he would be gone, and all would be over, and she would face the long To-morrow.

But if, before he went, she could only make one great effort to vindicate her love and what she had been willing to risk for it, then, though her loss would still be as great, her humiliation would be less. Never before had Gret been conscious of the laconic habit that was part of her nature. If she could be given, for only just a few minutes, the power of fluent speech, the silvery tongue, that belonged to some, then she could show him—what in her heart she knew so well—how much the viewpoint in a case counts, and how, though no man can sin against himself and not know it, yet in dealing with his fellow no one law levels the workings of divers minds.

She looked up at him suddenly, and drew a long breath. She knew she could never say half she meant, but for the sake of that long, reproachful To-morrow she would try.

"If I could only make you see, before you go, how I look at things!" she said wistfully. "Not that it matters now, only—just so that you 'll know, and so that I 'll know that you know. But, you see, I think more than I can say; I mean, I can't express my thoughts or the things I understand way down in myself."

Ludlowe watched her attentively, and Gret turned her head back to the river so that the sight of his face should not come between her and her thoughts.

"I know you think I ought to feel like a woman that

has tried to do a very wicked thing and been found out; but I don't. I'm not sorry for anything I've done. If I had to live my life over again, and knew no more each day than I did, I should do the same things over again. It seems to me it's the right thing to succeed, to keep going on somewhere, if one can; and there's generally only one way at a time to do that. Now, I've done lots of things that are not right—not called right. Things that I see people on the stage and in books breaking themselves all up over. But those things don't bother me. They were the best things I could see to do at the time, and I did them. I always have done that. I always saw ahead of me what I wanted, and I went after it, a day at a time. I never gave up because I was afraid. It is a poor Indian that does that. And that is why, when you asked me to be your wife,"—her voice lowered to tones so soft, so rich, that they fell on the still air like lingering music—"if I had had to die a hundred deaths to pay for just one year, I would have come!"

Her head was thrown back, and her eyes shone in beauty; and Ludlöwe was held still; for a power emanated from this slim, erring girl that he could not refute: the power of those who live, without hesitation and without fear, up to their ruling convictions, even though they be mistaken.

After a moment he moved as if to cast off her spell. His intellect rebelled against being carried so resistlessly past every known buoy.

"You are not consistent, Gret," he said. "If you follow so ruthlessly after your desires, how do you come, of your own doing, to lose so much that you had gained?"

"There are some things that we don't do," she replied gently. "And we always know what they are when we come to them."

Lights began to appear in the house behind them, and

Gret jumped up. Ludlowe rose, too, and she stood a moment before him, her eyes wandering slowly over his face.

"I will explain to mother before you come in—enough, so that she will understand," she said. But still she stood, looking at him with yearning, searching eyes. Then she turned to go; yet stayed one moment. Her head was thrown back, and her eyes full of a sad, scornful light; and she spoke as if comforting herself.

"There used to be an old Indian—Jim—who trapped for Murray. He taught me many things. 'Always try for big game,' he said." And she held her hand above her head in quaint illustration. "'Often get him. Good! Got something then. Sometimes,'" and she shrugged her shoulders, true Indian style, "'not get him. Pay big price then.'" She laughed—a laugh of real amusement, and yet so ironic and so bitter that it was sadder than a week of tears. "Well, I 've tried, and I 've failed; but I 'm not sorry. One must have a rule to live up to, and all rules fail sometimes."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LONG TO-MORROW

WHEN first Gret turned toward that future whose somber face she dreaded to scan, she was afraid most of all of herself. A period of apathy, of inactivity, lay before her; for something had gone out of her—some energy, poise, buoyancy—it could not be said what, that before had made life one long delight. At first she labored valiantly to forget. She went often down to the Harbor, just for the mere movement of rowing; she went down to the mill, and up to the camp. And she instituted herself chief guide to Bobbie and his two San Francisco friends in their hunting expeditions.

This last proved, for a time, a successful diversion. Finding that one of the young San Franciscans was a hunter of almost world-wide experience, and still wider conceit in his own proficiency, Gret expended much time and thought laying traps, into which the experienced hunter fell with distressing regularity. Not for nothing had Gret been instructed in woodcraft and animal-craft by such men as old Murray and Indian Jim—a fact which Bobbie was at pains to point out one night to the still unsuspecting victim of her humor. It took the victim a little time fully to realize that Gret was one too many for him, even on his own grounds of hunting; but when realization came he grew cautious, whereupon the pleasures of the chase—after the hunter—palled on Gret and she was forced to seek other diversions.

Striving to keep away from her own thoughts, Gret

lived more than ever in the lives of others. And for this reason, perhaps sooner than she otherwise might, Gret discovered that a spirit of discontent—or it might be only exaggerated restlessness—was creeping abroad in the camp. There were some days when Gret could not face the camp and the chatter and jocularities of the boys; but when she did go among them she took care to be nothing but her old self, alive as she always had been to their interests and aspirations. And in this way, earlier than any one else, she became aware of the inception of that insidious foe to camp-bosses and successful work—discontent. It was very vague as yet, merely a chafing against the deadly monotony of winter life in a camp; but it was the beginning of worse things, and the dawn of her discovery came to Gret one morning as she stopped to talk to Chester at the head of the slough.

Chester was sitting by the quiet, but gently simmering donkey, and he was looking decidedly dull. His face brightened when he saw Gret, and for that reason she sat down a while on the truck of the engine, and gossiped with him.

Presently she went on her way up to the camp. But she was thinking as she went. She would go in and consult the old reliable Jake as to the impression that was taking shape in her mind. In him she found instant and alarming confirmation.

"Why, 'course they 're getting discontented. Did n't you know that before?"

"No, of course not," replied Gret earnestly. "What makes you think so, Jake?"

"Oh, can easy tell. I expect it 's because they got kinder done out of their Christmas doings," said Jake thoughtfully. "They 're beginning to kick on everything. Said yesterday that the yellow of my cakes was n't all eggs."

Gret laughed outright. "I told you it was too yellow to look natural."

"Well, heavens and earth!" said Jake, exasperated. "It would take two dozen eggs to make a cake look that yellow, and how do you suppose I 'm going to get eggs like that?"

"I know you could n't. And so do they," responded Gret promptly; "but you put *some* eggs in, did n't you?"

"Course; quite enough to make the cake good."

"Well, then, why did n't you let it go at that? Or, if you wanted to, put the least little bit of coloring in?"

"Oh, well, now, I 've been cooking for these logger fellows for years, and I guess I know them from A to Z," said Jake with cold dignity. "If it was the best cake on earth, and was n't a blazing yellow, they 'd imagine it did n't taste good. They just wanted something to kick at, and the cake was as good as anything else to row over. They 're getting discontented, pining for a racket of some kind. And they 'll have all they want," concluded Jake ominously, "if they get trying any of their monkey-shines on me."

"It 's foolish to talk like that, Jakey," said Gret, the manager of men. "It would n't do any good anywhere. It 's just as you say, the boys are getting dull and twisty. You see, the dance and doings they generally have at Christmas turns the year for them, and makes them feel like starting a new one. As it is, they 've had a long, dull stretch. I 'm not at all surprised they get cranky once in a while."

"Well, what about me?" demanded Jake. "Ain't it just as dull for me?"

"Of course. And you 're getting as cranky as the rest of them."

Jake looked cross for a moment, and then smiled.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he inquired jestingly.

But Gret sat considering. She was not going to pass the matter as a jest. In the first place, it was valuable as a subject to keep her from considering her own case; and, in the second place, it was an important matter on its own merits. It did not do to let a spirit of discontent get a start in a camp. The most restless would begin to leave, and nothing was more infectious than the quitting mania. That meant a camp-load of new men, the thoughts of which Gret greatly disliked. She rather wondered that Dick had not noticed the change in the mood of the men. But he was always so busy. Among other things, Gret made up her mind to call his attention to existing shadows, lest they be cast before more genuine difficulties. And in the meantime she cast about in her mind for a means to help matters herself, conscious that the whole question centered about the providing of some excitement to break the monotony of life.

"Any kind of doings, almost, would give the boys something to talk about and help them on toward the summer, would n't it?" said Gret thoughtfully after a while.

"Most likely. But there 's no holidays—nothing that I can think of between now and Decoration Day," replied Jake. "And that 's not much to them. Still, it 's a holiday."

"Oh, goodness!" Gret laughed. "Might as well not think of that at all. No—but could n't we get up something ourselves? Has n't anybody got a birthday? We could get up a surprise or something. That would be better than nothing."

"Hum," nodded Jake, beginning to take a business view of matters. "Yes, s'pose we might do something like that. And have a keg of beer and some red. They would n't care for it without."

"Oh, of course." Gret looked with wise, meditative eyes down the great cañon. "I 'd only stay for supper and maybe a little while after, so that the boys could get in and have a real good time and get themselves under the table. Then if they have an awful headache the next morning they 'll think they never had such a glorious time in all their lives."

"That 's right," corroborated Jake promptly.

"Well, can you think of a birthday?" inquired Gret.

"Nope; not among our old hands."

"How would it be for one half of the camp to surprise the other?"

"Could n't be done," said Jake. "Could n't keep it from 'em."

"Well, let 's surprise Dick, then!" decided Gret. "Never mind about any birthday. He 'd be very easy to surprise, because he always goes into his cabin quite early. Yes, let 's do that!" Her mind quickly began to arrange details. "We 'll have a fine supper, Jake."

"You bet!" responded Jake, closing his eyes in professional fervor, apparently forgetting that he was preparing a big dose of extra work for himself. "The boys would give fifty cents or a dollar apiece, I know."

"Well, I 'll tell you, Jake," said Gret, thoughtfully. "If it can be helped, I 'd rather the boys would n't have to do anything like that. I 'm going down to the mill. The camp 's been pretty good to the mill now and again, and I 'm sure they 'd like to help this scheme out. If they 'll give the wine and beer, I 'll do the rest myself."

"I 'll give five dollars," said Jake.

"All right, Jakey." Gret got up with her usual energy. "I 'll go straight down to the mill now. And, Jakey, you think of all the things you 'll want while I 'm gone, will you? Let 's have boiled ham, and cake—real eggs." This last over her shoulder with a little chuckle of laughter.

Jake took this sally good-temperedly; and as Gret went leaping and swaying off down the skid-road he began, still peeling apples, to prepare a mental supper menu and list of what would be required therefor.

As Gret had predicted, the idea was received at the mill with great acclaim.

"It 'll be a great thing for you fellows to see," observed Bobbie to his friends, as the three young men stood in a semi-circle round Gret.

"Must n't let them think, though, that you 've come to look them over," said Gret quickly. "Or else you 'll very likely see more than you bargained for."

"Of course not!" responded Bobbie promptly, replying for the three. "Most of those fellows up there are all right. They 've all been first-rate to me. Who 's going to stand the whack?" he inquired then.

"Well—I don't know altogether—yet," answered Gret deliberately. "I 'm going to stand good for the supper myself."

"Well, we 'll stand for the liquor part of the business," said Bobbie, chuckling. "When 's it coming off?"

Gret paused, having forgotten to discuss that point with Jake. "It must be on Saturday, because of the headaches all Sunday. Next Saturday!" with a decisive nod of the head.

"All right! We 'll get the elixir up here Friday afternoon by the *Transfer*," said Bobbie with satisfaction. "How are we going to get it up to the camp without Dick seeing it?"

"You get it here, and I 'll talk to Chester and Oly," said Gret. "They 'll find some way of getting it up to the camp after dark Saturday. And, say, it 's Wednesday now. Jake 's just got to cook like fun between now and Saturday, and so he 'll have to have his supplies this afternoon. I 'm going to get a list of what he needs, and

don't you boys feel like getting out the launch and taking me down to Quellish?"

"You bet!" said Bobbie. "Boys!"—with a wave of the hand—"Untie the shoo-shoo boat."

Gret laughed and looked Bobbie over with amused, kindly eyes as he stood in characteristic pose before her, which was hands in pocket and feet about a yard apart on the mossy slope. There was as much easy understanding and familiarity between Gret and Bobbie as if they had been brother and sister. Indeed, quite as much understanding as Gret was ever likely to have accorded a real brother, had she possessed one.

"I won't be more than half an hour," she said. "We'll bring all the stuff up here to the mill, and then to-night the mill boys can help carry it up to the kitchen. You go and get ready. I'll hurry." And she sped away.

Jake was rather horrified at the slight margin of time allowed in view of the cooking to be done. Still, he was decidedly infected with the general enthusiasm, and so he compounded a long list of requirements, all of which Gret promised should be in his kitchen that evening.

And so they were. Most impetuous and enthusiastic was the shopping done by the four young folk. Quellish was turned upside down and ransacked over. And when the victorious shoppers turned the surprisingly docile gasoline launch back up the Wishkah, they had succeeded in collecting all Jake's requirements, and various additions of their own. In the stern of the boat lay three of the finest hams to be unearthed in the Harbor, a tongue, bananas, nuts, raisins, essences, chocolate, and many other things. Among the additions to the original list were half a dozen bottles of pickles and a sack of oranges. All these things, as suggested by Gret, were deposited for the time being in the mill. And that night a giggling, heavily laden line of shadowy figures might

have been seen straggling up the board walk and cautiously approaching the camp. Bessemer, all unaccustomed to prowling in the brush by night, caught his foot in a tangled growth around the path by the skid-road and went sprawling full length, preceded by an avalanche of oranges. Gret was overcome with mirth and leaned against the skid, grasping tightly a bag of bananas, while Bobbie and Van Cuyn applied anything but endearing epithets to the fallen one. By the aid of matches the greater part of the oranges were gathered up, however, and the cavalcade started again, arriving, after much scouting and due precautions, safely in Jake's kitchen.

The next days were very busy ones for Gret, her industry proceeding along altogether unprecedented lines. She cracked and chopped nuts, sliced bananas, beat eggs, and generally constituted herself Jake's right hand. She also found time to acquaint quite a few of the men with the scheme in hand, bidding them spread the news abroad. But to Chester and Oly alone she deputed the task of getting the beer and wine into the camp after dinner on Saturday night.

As might be supposed, when the fateful evening arrived Dick was unusually late retiring to the books and studies he had adopted of late years. He sat in the men's hall and smoked and chatted, and generally lingered about so unconscionably that the nerves of the waiting men were all on edge. He might, if he had been on the lookout for anything of the kind, have noticed a certain lack of spontaneity and cordiality; but, not suspecting anything of the sort, he did not. Finally, however, he did retire to the cabin that was one of the few tokens of his superior office, and then subdued excitement filled the air. Chester and Oly rushed two wheelbarrows into the kitchen, laden with precious liquid, and Bobbie, aided by his chums, proceeded to tap the keg and fill jugs of beer,

while Chester and Oly filled corresponding jugs of wine. Charlie and Joe and Gret rushed into the dining-room and whisked off the syrup, sugar bowls, pickles and various condiments usually standing in broken lines up the middle of the long tables, and spread over them tablecloths and sheets borrowed from Lizzie for the occasion. Gret had big jars of wild grape and fern ready, which were placed at intervals up the center of the tables; then came cakes—banana, cream, chocolate, lemon, nut, and raisin—really fine examples of the baker's art, for Jake could certainly cook when he chose; heaped-up dishes of cut ham and tongue, rye and white bread, pickles, fruit, and last, but by no means least, big jugs of alternate beer and wine.

When all was complete the tables really looked very nice, and Gret regarded them with much more admiration than ever she had accorded the banquet tables of San Francisco. As a last touch, every lamp in the camp was ranged about the walls of the dining-room, which presented a most brilliant interior.

Then the word went round like a thrill of electricity that all was ready; and groups that had gathered noiselessly round lighted doorways, only to melt into darkness at the least unusual sound, quickly conglomerated into one big crowd round Dick's cabin.

Suddenly, at a given signal, pandemonium broke loose; tin pans were beaten and the air was filled with yells. The cabin door flew open, and the amazed figure of the foreman stood on the lighted threshold. At first it almost seemed to him that a riot was on; but then out of the darkness came Gret's bubble of glee and Bobbie's drawl, singing "we won't go home till morning," and he knew that, whatever it was, it was all right. Then Bobbie darted forward and seized one arm and Gret clutched the other, and, with the whole camp bustling gleefully along

behind, he was escorted to his chair at the head of the long table.

Dick's amazement at the sight of the dining-room was immense and unfeigned, and added the last item to the general sum of satisfaction. Gret sat on his right hand and Bobbie on the left, and on either side these two sat the greatly edified Bessemer and Van Cuy. From them on either side ranged long rows of broadly smiling faces, many of them familiar to Dick for years, though some, of course, comparatively strange and new.

Whatever the lumberman does he does with all his might, and when it comes to enjoying himself he certainly makes no exception to the rule. Supper began with an abandon and gusto that came as a revelation to the young society men, who had probably hitherto prided themselves on knowing about all there was to know of the art of having a good time. Cakes melted into thin air, dishes became suddenly empty, and beer and wine were emptied down capacious throats. Then the gift of tongues descended on the jolly woodsmen, and they spoke with many voices.

Gret sat enjoying it all and taking everything in. As the fun and noise increased she reluctantly made up her mind to go, but still sat on a few minutes longer. Then, she noticed that Dick cast an apprehensive glance at her. In all her familiarity with the camp hands Dick had never tolerated for her, and Gret had never had to put up with, any loose talk. Many of the men here Dick knew; some he did not. Each would have his tongue loosened now to whatever extent his nature prompted, and Gret was the only woman present. Gret smiled reassuringly at him and rose.

"Well, I must go," she observed to those near her.

Bobbie caught the words and shot onto his feet. He brandished a glass of wine. "Boys, Gret has to go. Be-

fore she does so, let us toast the man in whose honor the feed is given. Here 's to Dick Swinton, our boss, the finest boss and the best fellow you boys will ever meet!"

Chorus of "You bet your life!" "That 's right, too!" "Hurrah!" and much enthusiastic drinking.

"And now, boys," went on Bobbie, with an elaborate bow to the girl standing opposite him. "Let us fill up and toast Miss Gret Silway, who instituted this most pleasant proceeding."

The men yelled themselves hoarse once more, and in the height of the excitement Chester arose in would-be stately manner. He held a glass aloft. "Here 's to Gret, the Angel of Silway's camp!"

"Aw—w, go on! Angel!" Oly stood up in disgust. "What kind of dime novel talk are you giving us?" He held up his glass, a tumbler full of red wine. "Here 's to Gret, not much of an angel, but *all right* just the same!"

The Californians screeched with mirth, and even Dick laughed uproariously. Gret, too, nearly cried with laughter. Oly's serious manner and deep and real disgust at what he considered a most abjectly inappropriate epithet appealed to her especially. Many voices now were clamoring for speeches. Dick got up and replied briefly in the genial, easy way that came of long handling of the material about him. He was loudly applauded, and then Gret was called upon. She looked amused at the idea; but for the time being she was completely carried out of herself, and she rose and faced the men with eyes darting gleams of laughter and lips that would hardly keep straight.

"Why, I could n't make a speech to save my life!" she declared. "But you boys know me and what 's in my mind. I 'm not much of an angel, as Oly says. If I were I would n't be one of Silway's camp. But I *am* one of

the camp, and shall be as long as I can remember it wherever I may be. I suppose things won't go on as they are forever. Changes are sure to come. But I hope they will go on long enough for us to have a few more times like this, with just the same old faces round and me here to every last time."

"Well done!" commended Bobbie, amidst ear-splitting shouts and terrific thumping of floor and tables. And then Gret bethought herself of something, and her clear, incisive tones were heard again.

"Now, boys, toast our good old Jakey, who has cooked himself to a cinder making all these fine things."

More deafening shouts, and much perilous waving of glasses, in the midst of which the abashed Jake murmured, all unheard, "Oh, pshaw!" And then, very quickly, before any one could move to accompany her, Gret slipped out and away into the whispering darkness.

She went easily along the board-walk, shining wet and clear in the starlight, and got into one of the boats rocking softly about the landing. And then she gave a long sigh, and sat for many minutes gazing into the darkly-bright waters. The exhilaration, the pleasure of seeing others pleased, died down. But she had forgotten for three days; and that was something.

The next day Gret took Dick aside and explained to him the real object of the surprise. And Dick comprehended immediately. He was quick to admit, both to himself and her, that he had taken his men too much as a matter of course. Wrapped up in his plans for the future, he had been over-confident of the present, and, as he observed to Gret, it was a pretty bad mistake for a man to make who had been handling men for years.

However, it was a hint that would not soon be forgotten. Thereafter Dick took his foremen and straw bosses more into his confidence, and through them his

men. And soon there began to float about the camp rumors of a second camp to be installed that summer; yes, and even rumors of a railroad. All of which interested the men greatly, of course, and gave them something to talk over and look forward to.

Early spring passed, and late spring blossomed into summer. But before that Gret had given up fleeing from herself. Sooner or later she had to accept things as they were, and better sooner than later. And so she set her back to the wall, and grimly allowed herself to realize that quiet acceptance of daily detail, that odd following of one day upon another with no golden thread to bind, which means about as near heartbreak as mortals come. And she yielded to her inclination to creep off somewhere and be alone much of her time. But she did not bewail nor repine. She wasted no maudlin sighs over that drear heart-sickness whose existence time alone could quench. She had great faith in the power of time—when she should have lived through enough of it.

And when the summer came, and the land bloomed in beauty, Gret went back to the hills and the woods. She would lie high up in the sunshine, and by those lakes with the shining faces, and lie there hour after hour and day after day, until everything was forgotten and her heart grew warm once more, and she was back again to that girl she was before—oh, before many things.

That summer Gret received several long letters from Arthur. He was in Mediterranean waters, on board Errol Ludlowe's yacht, *Immortalité*. Perceiving that argument was useless, Ludlowe had descended forcibly on his gentle but obstinate friend and carried him off for a long sea trip.

Errol had told Arthur—and no one else in the world—almost word for word what had happened between himself and Gret; and Arthur was from the first the strong-

est ally Gret had. He knew better than any one else the sacrifice she had made; and as the two men sat together on deck and talked of the matter, Arthur would unwaveringly refuse to be turned aside—even for the sake of argument—from his faith in the girl.

"I don't see how you can apply such a word as unprincipled," he said over and over again. "She is the strongest adherent to principle that I ever knew of. Principles are ideas, and vary with varying people. When she came to her principle she gave up everything rather than transgress it. I am not disappointed in her. She is thoroughbred."

But Errol's pride of family was so innate that he could not easily forget Gret's contemplated sin against it; though neither could he easily forget that last sight of her—those wide, shining eyes, the young, lithe body instinct with life, the music of that voice grown low with passion, the pride that would not plead.

Gret of course knew nothing of all this. But she saw at once that Arthur knew everything, and that his sympathies were all with her. She gathered, too, that Arthur was failing very fast. He spoke now and again of a longing to return home to his beloved work, but of positive refusals on Errol's part to allow it on account of his weakness. Gret loved to get the letters. She gathered foolish comfort from the fact that Errol must have been somewhere near when they were written; and yet each one started afresh the hungry longing that she could not kill, for each time Arthur sent kindly remembrances from Errol.

The fact that Gret was not, after all, going to marry Errol Ludlowe was accepted in the community with possibly much private, but very little outward, comment. Many questioned her; but Gret turned all curiosity aside with jests and the smiling assurance that she was not so

easily to be got rid of. Bobbie, of course, heard all that his mother knew of the matter, which was not much, and in turn communicated it to Bertie. But, as Gret volunteered absolutely nothing on the subject herself, both were too gentlemanly to ask questions.

Mrs. Silway herself wondered a great deal over the sudden termination of what had seemed to her an exceptional chance for Gret; but Eva, probably—in the beginning, at all events—more on account of her love for Robin than out of any consideration for Gret, had never taken her mother further into her confidence; and Gret had merely informed her that she and Errol had looked very differently on certain matters and had therefore decided permanently to disagree. And though she would not question much on a subject that she instinctively felt was unwelcome, yet Mrs. Silway pondered the matter often. And once, when Gret read portions of Arthur's letters to her, she said tentatively:

"I shall always be sorry that you and the major decided to disagree, Gret. It seems to me that, unless it was some very vital matter, it would have been well to have conceded a point. To my way of thinking he was a man any woman would learn to love very intensely—if she had a heart at all."

Gret smiled, a faint, amused smile. She was thinking how much difference a knowledge of a subject makes.

"But sometimes I think you have n't a heart," went on her mother, half jestingly.

"I hope not," replied Gret gravely. "They 're very troublesome things, are n't they, mother?"

"Yes, they are," said Mrs. Silway quietly; "but it takes a very great intellect to equal the pleasures of a very simple heart."

CHAPTER XXV

SAVED!

OWING to the death of the most costly member of the Silway family, and the fact, therefore, that two thirds at least of the profits of the camp returned to it to be spent in developments, it came about that that summer was able to see great changes. A second camp was installed on the new N. E. section; and still further north, through Dick's watchfulness and energy, another extensive and very valuable tract of timber-land was acquired. In the acquisition of this, Dick forestalled by only a very few days the agents of that great lumber trust whose insidious and carefully concealed greed has honey-combed the West.

Up to and through this new tract Dick hoped to construct a small logging railroad. And in respect to this he came one afternoon and held a long consultation with Mrs. Silway; and that lady in turn detailed particulars of the consultation to her daughters. Some, though not all, of Dick's plans and proposals were already known to Gret, as may be supposed.

"He wants to be allowed to put about seven thousand dollars into the business, and, of course, share profits proportionately," observed Mrs. Silway serenely.

"Oh, good for Dick!" said Gret, a trifle surprised. This was an idea that Dick had not communicated. "I did n't know he had that much, though I knew he was always saving."

"Oh, well! He must have been getting a hundred and fifty a month for a good many years, and I don't suppose his expenses were ever the odd fifty," said Mrs. Silway. "The seven thousand is not all he has, in effect. He has some valuable timber holdings on the sound which he is waiting a favorable opportunity to dispose of. But for the present he wants to be allowed to put that much actual cash into our concern."

"Well, let 's let him," advised Gret.

"Yes; I am in favor of the proposal myself," agreed Mrs. Silway; "it binds a valuable man to us."

"Oh, I can't imagine Dick leaving us," smiled Gret. "But he takes so much interest in everything, and is so good, that it seems only fair that he should be allowed to share things."

"Yes, I think so, too. I think it will be a benefit all the way round," said Mrs. Silway contentedly. "The logging railroad will be a very expensive affair, and Mr. Swinton's money will go a long way toward paying for the engine—a turtleback, he called it."

"If we keep on getting bigger," observed Eva musingly, and speaking for the first time, "we shall all be quite rich some day. And then we can take a trip to Europe, eh, mother?"

"Oh, is that what you want to do?" inquired Gret, looking at her sister amusedly.

The two girls had become the best of friends again, though Gret had never made any overtures to Eva. The sense of her loss was so keen upon her that she could not feel that she owed any. But Eva, naturally sweet-natured and affectionate, when the poignancy of her grief wore off, realized something of her sister's sacrifice and was ashamed of her early unreasonableness. Her eyes, keener through her own loss, could trace something that had gone out of Gret's face and never would return. The

hope, the alertness, the all-embracing curiosity were gone; and the stilled look in her eyes was that of a woman who had looked beyond the veil of youth, and knew. Her nature was so different, so much less intense, that Eva could not measure the depth of Gret's loss; but her intuition was sufficient to measure a part of it. And Gret, when she was ready to return, received her sister back to the same old footing without comment.

"Oh, yes!" replied Eva now. "I think it would be lovely, don't you, Gret? Fancy seeing all those glorious old places that we read about. And Rome and Venice. Oh, my!" Eva clasped her hands together in ecstasy. And again Gret laughed. "Why, Gret, would n't you like to see them?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, you don't enthuse much," grumbled Eva.

"We're not starting yet," said Gret with a smile. "No use wasting enthusiasm this far ahead."

And then the conversation returned to Dick and his plans, in all of which the entire Silway family appeared to have unbounded and united confidence. The further she became acquainted with him the more Mrs. Silway liked her foreman; and if anything was wanting to her complete and correct estimate of his manly character and sterling qualities, Gret promptly supplied it.

And so it came about that the Silway Logging Company filed new articles of incorporation, and became Silway & Swinton. Dick deprecated the adoption of his name, but the Silways wished it, and it was done. The camp rejoiced greatly, but watched carefully, nevertheless, for signs of demoralization to appear in their favorite boss. None became discernible, though, even to the most watchful eye. Dick took his men into all his plans, and made them part and parcel of them. And everything went along in unbroken harmony.

Gret especially was pleased at this substantial recognition of her friend's worth as a man. She patted him on the back one day, at the close of the proceedings which made him a member of the firm.

"There! Now you 're one of the family, Dick."

Dick turned and looked at her; the keen, straight glance of his eyes was faintly quizzical. "Not yet," he said quietly.

Gret looked rather surprised. She was up in the new camp with him, and together they were considering the site of the new railroad.

"Well," she said after a moment, "you 're beginning to be. Mother gets to know you better and to feel more at home with you every day."

Dick laughed. And again Gret did not see the entire applicability of the laugh. But he said nothing, and she sat down by him on the tree, and gazed over the pine-clad, sunlit stretch of beauty before her.

"You see," went on Dick, with a wave of the arm, and reverting to their previous conversation, "we 'll log all down the sides of this cañon, and then have three sections at the head of it. That engine will haul the whole business."

"It 's an awfully big stretch," observed Gret reflectively.

Dick nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I shall put another camp at the head of the cañon, to log those eastern sections. Too far for them to come to us."

"But the boom will be too high up then, won't it?" queried Gret, her eye following the proposed line of road.

"The logs are easily taken up," replied Dick; "and then we shall have to lengthen the boom a good bit anyway. Oh, we 've got our work cut out for the next two years, all right," contentedly.

"Oh, my! I do wish I were a man," sighed Gret enviously, "so that I could help."

"You can help more as a woman," said Dick quietly. "Maybe you have helped more than you know." And then, going on in the same quiet voice, "I heard something the other day that is a great secret. Want to hear it, Gret?"

"Yes," promptly.

"I heard—mind, you must be just as surprised as ever when they tell you—that we 're going to lose our Jake and you your Lizzie."

"What!" Gret's eyes were as big as saucers. She would not have been more amazed if Dick had told her that the camp had fallen through the bottom of the cañon. "Jake going—and Lizzie! Why, the camp would n't be the camp without Jake!"

"Yes, they are going to be married, and buy out Mrs. Olesen at the Pacific," went on Dick. "But remember, it 's a dead secret yet. I 'm awfully sorry; but then—I suppose we could n't hope to keep Jake forever."

"Well! Jake 's pretty sly about it!" said Gret indignantly. "I never saw him talking to Lizzie overmuch."

"Oh, no!" Dick laughed. "Jake has n't lived with us all these years for nothing."

"Humph!" Gret looked sincerely disgusted. "I suppose you 'll tell me you 're going to get married and go off next!"

Dick smiled queerly. "I wish I could—tell you I was going to get married, I mean. What would you do then, Gret?"

"I don't know," petulantly. "Oh, well, we would n't try to have a camp at all then, that 's all."

And then, abruptly and still intensely disgusted, Gret went home, to stare hard at Lizzie and see if she looked as natural as ever.

In the August of that year Mrs. Baring paid a brief visit to the mill. She did not see much of Gret; and when she did see her, question as she might, she could not gain any satisfaction concerning the cause of the broken engagement. She informed Gret, however, that Maude Vibart still occupied her old place in the household, and from certain points in Errol's manner before sailing Mrs. Baring was able to safely predict that the serene heiress would undoubtedly, on his return from the yachting tour, be the next woman of his choice. And Gret, agreeing in her own heart with this prediction, went off to rage with herself and the jealousy that consumed her.

Before this visit of Mrs. Baring's—this turning over again of the ashes of the might-have-been—Gret had obtained a certain amount of peace with herself. But such as it had been, it fled, and its place was filled by a jealousy, a constant fear, that would not sleep nor be dispelled. As long as Errol remained alone Gret felt that she could stand the separation; but on the day that he married another woman she did not feel that she could live and remain sane.

So ill at ease was she, and so totally unable to stay any length of time in any one place, that she grew very wild, and roamed the trackless forests in reckless fashion.

Dick Swinton was very uneasy, being as usual afraid for the girl's life; and even Jake, generally so complacent in matters pertaining to Gret's safety, when that young lady coolly emerged from the woods hours after dark, took her to task seriously. Gret took all the scoldings with meekness and gravity on her face and grim mirth in her heart. She was inclined to think that what would be would be; and in the meantime she must be amused.

Dick was more puzzled and worried over Gret, it is safe to say, than over all the business details of the camps and his stewardship thereof combined.

He was about to retire one night, but noticed with his usual watchfulness a resumption of sounds in the kitchen, which had long ago grown quiet. Glancing out of the cabin, and seeing the kitchen lighted up again, and Jake moving hurriedly about within, he walked across to discover the reason for these unusual proceedings. His astonished eyes beheld Gret seated in a chair. That in itself was sufficiently surprising at the hour, but her appearance was what amazed him. Never once in her life could he remember to have seen Gret even tired; now she was physically all but collapsed. But her eyes, half laughing, half defiant, glared at Dick as he stood in the shadowy doorway.

"Too bad to come bothering Jakey at this time, is n't it, Dick?" she said, and there was exhaustion even in the tones of her voice; "but I had to fix up a little before I went home."

"I should think so!" Dick came and stood before her. Every line in the lithe, strong body was limp, her hair streamed down over her shoulders, her right sleeve was torn open from elbow to shoulder and the flesh was plainly ragged and bleeding within, and there was blood on her temple. But all this might have resulted from a bad fall, and it was the exhaustion that claimed Dick's particular attention.

"What chased you—bear or a man?"

"Not going to tell," obstinately. "I 'm all right. That 's all that 's necessary. Don't look so cross, Dick. And Jake, too. Just look how mad Jake looks! It 's your fault, Jake. I told you not to go to any trouble. And I won't drink any coffee if you do make it."

"Yes, you will, too!" said Jake in an indignant screech.

He was literally dancing about the kitchen, tickling up the half-dead fire in the range, and trying to prepare coffee and gather together some soft white rags and a bowl of water all at once. "I'm not mad at the trouble, and you know that all the while you're saying it. I'm just mad to think you'll go on taking such fool chances spite of all I can say to you. What can anybody do with a girl like this?"—to Dick.

Dick shook his head, and held out his hand for the bowl of water with which the indignant cook was approaching. "Yes," thrusting it into his hands. "You wash the blood off her face while I make the coffee. Wonder where that fool Joe's got to."

Dick bathed the blood off the scratched temple with ridiculous gentleness, Gret holding up her face like an obedient child. Then he pulled aside the ragged edges of the torn sleeve, and as he saw the somewhat badly torn flesh, shivered slightly. Gret laughed. "You big silly! Never mind that. I'll wash that all off when I get home. Only thing is," frowning slightly, "how am I to get home? I can't get quietly into my room. Have I got anything at all left down here—an old jacket or anything, Jake?" Jake shook his head over the coffee strainer. "Oh, well, I must trust to luck. No, don't try to wash it off, Dick; it will only begin to bleed again. I'll wash it when I get home."

Jake now brought up a steaming cup of coffee and a tempting piece of pie on a plate. Gret took the coffee and drank it eagerly, but shook her head at the pie.

"Can't eat pie!" exclaimed Jake, his eyes round with amazement.

"She's too used up to eat," observed Dick, watching the girl drink the coffee with a curious expression in his eyes. "Tell us what happened to you, Gret."

But Gret shook her head, and Dick forbore to press the

question. After she had rested a while Dick and Jake took her home, Jake carrying a lantern and Dick keeping a firm hold on Gret's arm, for so tired was she that her usually sure feet stumbled painfully. On the way back to the camp the two men discussed the problem of her appearance.

"It's some man," asserted Jake decidedly; "and that's why she won't tell. Thinks it would make trouble."

"And so it would," said Dick between his teeth. "Some Indian, I suppose, or trapper—"

"No, no Indian," objected Jake promptly. "She's known most of them round about here all her life. An Indian don't turn on a friend. No. You see, if some fellow tried to do her harm and she broke away, he'd naturally chase her for all he was worth. Because he'd figure on her coming straight down here and telling about it, which would likely make the country round about too hot for him."

"Rather!" muttered Dick, enraged at the mere suggestion.

"And he'd just about have done for her if he'd got her," went on Jake thoughtfully. "But it's no kind of use trying to stop Gret roaming about. It might be a good idea, though, to try and get her to carry a gun about with her and to teach her to shoot. Suppose we could do that?"

But Dick Swinton shook his head. He had long ago ceased to prophesy concerning Gret. As he turned in that night he made up his mind to say nothing further to her concerning this night's occurrence. It was useless to remonstrate.

However, the next day he partially departed from his resolution. He did not remonstrate, but he inquired. Gret was up on the grounds, and had just watched with her usual delight the sighing sweep of a pine-top through

the air. Now she was seated on the fallen monster as the trimmers attacked it. Dick came and sat by her.

"Gret, what kind of life is this you're leading?"

Gret turned round and faced him. As it happened, she was in an amiably reflective mood herself. "I don't know. What kind is it?"

"It's no life for a young woman," said Dick decidedly.

"Well, what would you advise me to do about it?"

"What do other young women do?"

"Well," began Gret with a serenely reflective air, "some of them—about half of them, I suppose—have to get their own living. I don't. I would n't know how to if I had to. What could I do?"

"I don't know. You'd manage something. But there's no need. So pass that and go on," smiling.

"Well. Some, I suppose, do housework," resumed Gret. "If I tried to meddle with the work, Lizzie would quit. And who'd thank me then? I can't sew, and it would n't do anybody much good if I did. What else is there that women do?"

Dick looked at her smiling. "Do you remember how mad you got at me one day, long ago, when I said what I supposed you'd do when you grew up?"

Gret remembered, and looked in his eyes and laughed. "Yes, I remember."

"Well? What do you think about it now?"

"Well, I suppose it's about all there is for some women to do," admitted Gret. "But, like all the rest, it's no good to me. Those I'd want would n't want me, and those that would want me I would n't want. So what's to be done?"

Dick did not reply. He sat with his chin resting on his hand, looking straight before him. And then presently he got up and went over to investigate the stopping of the donkey, whose intermittent hum had ceased for the

last few minutes. And Gret remained, as usual, mistress of the situation.

Very early in the following spring Gret received a letter, at sight of which her heart leaped into her throat. It was from Errol, himself, and announced Arthur's death and burial in Tangier. The writer told of many things gathered together for her by the dead man, and promised their safe transmission when the yacht arrived once more in Californian waters. Just then Errol was about to take a trip up into the Moroccan interior which promised to be of more than usual interest. He was going to accompany an envoy of the French government, who made the trip, under promise of safe convoy from the Sultan, in the interest of the proposed policing of the country by France. At the close of this trip, Errol observed, he intended returning home and endeavoring once more to settle down.

Gret laid the letter against her cheek, and caressed it almost as foolishly as a school-girl receiving her first love-letter, and then scorned herself heartily for doing it.

But as week followed week, and the time for the probable return of the *Immortalité* drew near, her feverish restlessness became pitiable, none the less so for being carefully hidden and expended mostly in the brush and among the hills. None, not even those nearest to her, guessed the state of mind she was in; but many noticed, in spite of the tan of her skin, how ill she looked. Her eyes, almost harsh in their brilliancy, were deeply shadowed round, and her lips had drawn lines of suffering that the smiles she wore among men could not hide.

Seeing that the most likely—indeed, the only—avenue of information concerning Errol was the mill-house, Gret went down there often. She was miserably afraid to hear of his return, but could not stay away from the probable news of it. Some days she pictured Bobbie reading to

her a portion of his mother's letter, telling of Errol's engagement at last to Maude Vibart. Or would Bobbie tell her? He might think— But Gret hardly thought he would suppose she would care much one way or another now.

But Bobbie never read to her or any other the news of Errol Ludlowe's engagement. Instead, one day, he came running toward her across the little lawn between the bluff and the Silway house. His boyish face was drawn with grief, and in his hand he waved an open newspaper.

"Gret!" he cried. "Look at that! You must have loved the dear old fellow once."

Gret looked at the sheet held up before her, and in big type she saw: "Brigand's victim noted San Francisco man." She read on, and saw how Major Errol Ludlowe, with the French Count Montispeau and retinue, had been treacherously murdered by order of the brigand chief while on the way by appointment to his stronghold. The article told in detail of the finding of the bodies of the two men and their guides and servants, laid in orderly fashion on the mountain side where the Sultan's troops would find them, and of immediate steps to be taken by the French government looking to retribution.

Gret read the article down and understood it. She even saw the bodies on the mountain-side in that dim, azure distance, and that one face, with the keen but tired eyes closed. And then she dashed the paper down to the ground, and threw up her arms with a sound that was not altogether a laugh and not altogether a cry, but something of both. And before Bobbie could stir she rushed across the sward and into the forest. Into the heart of the wood, past all possible following, she rushed; and on a hillside, above a plain of swamp alder, whose level tops of delicate green were like a soft sea, she fell on her knees with a strange little, dry, sobbing cry.

Saved—she was saved! He was hers now—hers, hers! No other woman could ever be his wife now, nor even his love for a few days. Oh, Errol—dead, dead! But she was the only woman he had ever asked to be his wife, or ever would.

There was none by to see this half-crazed woman who had been hurt almost past enduring and had borne it in terrible, unbroken silence. And Gret's frenzy was the more terrible in that it was the breakdown of a strong spirit. She rocked herself on her knees, and wrung her hands and moaned and crooned in a joy that was sadder than most grief.

And then, by and by, she lay face down in the harsh moss still wet with the late rains of spring, and tears came—not a rain of them in woman fashion, but great, hot tears that welled up and blinded her, the first in many years. She thought of the dear, dead man, on the hillside in that far-off country. How long had he, perhaps, lain there dying with none to soothe or caress; how many nights had he lain there dead with none to know or care! She shivered to think of the awful knife-thrust from merciless hands. The hurt of it, and she not there to soothe.

But she could wait now, because he was hers and none could take him away. Dead as he was, she had never felt him nearer since he left her those many months ago. She could see the serene, high-bred face, and feel on her face again the slow, quiet glance she loved. And no other woman could come between her and that glance, none!

After a few hours quiet came back to Gret. And then she fell asleep—a sleep of exhaustion to which many months had contributed—and slept long after the coming of dark.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ULTIMATE NICHE

TOWARD the middle of summer, delayed much beyond the time of their original intention by the tardiness of Mrs. Olesen in retiring from the Pacific Hotel, Jake and Lizzie were married, even according to the early prophecy of Dick. And never in all the history of Silway's camp had there been such doings as there were at that wedding. And such presents!

Gret, during the festivities, was the busiest person possible. And even for a short time afterward, while Lizzie got satisfactorily settled in her new abode, there was much to amuse and some few things to do. But soon the shouting and the tumult died, and home and camp settled down again to a peaceful routine of work that now was so rarely broken. The Widow Bennett took Lizzie's place in the Silway household, aided by a young girl, and Jake's place at the camp range was filled by a cook of long experience and assertive air. His place in camp councils and in the affections of the camp remained vacant, as he was assured, much to his edification, over and over again by many and various, including Gret. Gret gave particular assurance that henceforth, when in need of pie or counsel, she would repair to the kitchen of the Pacific.

Work on the railroad was begun early that summer, and camp and cañon hummed with the sounds of men and horses and machinery. Gret took great interest in the

work, and watched and admired afresh Dick's just and tactful handling of the large body of men, and his grave, unflagging purpose and energy. She envied him his settled aim in life, though she could not quite see what it was, for him. Still, his whole heart was in his work, and that was something to be thankful for. Gret often wished that she had some work to do that she liked to do, or that was any good to any one. She felt like a stray dog, whom none would very greatly miss, though to whose presence none objected.

She bestowed quite a little half amused, half scornful and wholly disgusted thought upon her future. She enjoyed an aimless peace now, the peace of one who has nothing particular to fear or lose. And she was content enough with her life, if she could go on indefinitely with it; but she knew she could not. She was quite sensible enough to know that the life she was leading, as Dick had once remarked, was no life for a woman. She was quite keen enough to know that the sight of a matured woman roaming idly and endlessly about a camp and associating with the men would be no pleasing sight even to the men themselves. Youth was with her now; but how about when it was gone? And every year lessened it.

Even as it was, she felt the spaces about her life lessening. She no longer felt unrestricted in her actions; for there were so many new men about, men who had not known her from childhood as some of the old hands had. She walked about the camps almost as freely as of old; but she did not travel down the skid-road on a chain of logs, nor go down the river on a raft, any more. The sense of the fitting that comes to a mature woman restrained her; and moreover, that unbounded joy in living that had once been hers was gone. The saving sense of humor was still strong within her, her love of nature as great as ever, and her mood amiable and contented. But

her heart had grown grave in a few months, and never again as of old would sing upon its way like a brook in spring-time.

And Gret often pondered these things as she sat by her own lake, the Hidden One, that bright companion of so many hours of delight, of so many hours of anguished struggle. She pondered, and wondered idly where the worth-while comes, as so many wonder in the short breathing spaces between the acts of life's drama.

So much had already gone out of her life, so many changes taken place in the personnel of it, that Gret grudged the thought of any further changes with a fervor that did not pause to note any possible advantage; and when she heard in confidence from her mother respecting another possible one, she was greatly injured. She felt that if many more changes took place there would be nothing of the old life left. Of course, the different personages effecting the changes remained mostly within sight and sound; but they occupied totally different places on the board of life and things were not the same.

Gret voiced the spirit of her discontent to Dick early one evening, having come across him on her way from the Hidden One. She was coming down the hillside between the two camps, and noticed him a little above her on a knoll that overlooked the scene of the day's work. He was strolling about, apparently sizing up the fine firs that clothed the sides of the tiny hill, and Gret glanced up at the tall and powerful figure with the folded arms. Then she promptly turned aside from her downward path, climbed up to where he was, and, sitting down at the foot of a tree, leaned her head against the bark. Dick stood looking down on her, his arms still folded; there was a strange, intent look in his eyes, and Gret wondered if he were going to scold her for roaming.

"Where have you been, Gret?"

"Only up to my lake," calmly. "You know it's quite a way. What were you doing? Looking at all the lots and lots and lots of work that you did to-day?"

"No," coolly. "I was just thinking that this would be a lovely spot for a little house."

"Yes, it would," agreed Gret, with a critical glance down the cañon and to the river beyond, winding like a silver thread out of sight. "But who 'd want it?"

"I do."

"You!" Gret lifted her eyes quickly to the man above her. "Why, what would you do with it, Dick?"

"Live in it. What do you suppose? Don't you think," with a peculiar smile, "I'm ever going to have a home?"

"Oh, yes—of course." And then, recollecting her former grievance, "Oh, yes, of course you will. You'll get married and change, too, like all the rest."

"I don't know that *I* shall change," replied Dick, with emphasis on the pronoun. "But why do you say 'too'? Is any one else going to change?"

"Well, this is in return confidence for the news you gave me in advance about Jake," glancing up with a smile. "Mother told me a few days ago that Bertie Fonsaker had asked her permission to come to the house to see Eva. He has been hanging about Eva for quite a while anyway. But that's his polite way—to ask mother. He's an awfully nice fellow, a gentleman in every way; but—"

"Yes, he is," corroborated Dick. "There's no 'but' about it."

"I know. I'm awfully fond of Bertie, just as much as I am of Bobbie. I was only thinking—" Her voice trailed off. She was really wondering at the diversity of Eva's tastes. Robin so tall and broad-shouldered, built like a man even if he were not one; and Bertie so slim

and gentle of manner. But she had come to the conclusion that Eva was a woman who had to love some one, heart being a very big portion of her make-up.

"Well, what were you thinking?" demanded Dick, who had been watching her curiously.

"Oh, I don't know—many things. That Bertie would be too easily bossed for one thing."

"Oh, well, Eva won't try to boss him. She's not that sort," said Dick.

"No," absently; and then: "Well, will you live in the house if you build it, Dick?"

"I will if I build it. I won't build it unless I can have the woman I want to live in it," answered Dick.

Gret lifted her eyes in a reproachful way. "Oh, Dick!" she said downheartedly. And then her eyes dropped gloomily to the cañon that the sweet September evening was filling with shadows. "There! I knew it would n't be long before you changed, too. I felt it. Changes never come alone."

A loneliness crept into her voice. If she lost Dick, she would lose a great deal; they had been companions so long and so truly. But then it was only right and to be expected. He was bound to find his place in life like all the rest of them. There were few like herself, with no ultimate niche provided.

"I don't know exactly what you mean by 'change,'" said Dick. "I shall still be the same man."

"Oh, yes," moodily. "But when you get married I can't come and talk to you as long as I like and as often as I like. And besides, you'll have others to talk to, and won't want to. You need n't tell me," frowning, "that it won't make any change in you, because I know it will. Of course, we shall still be friends, but—oh, it'll be different."

"Well, I'm not married yet," observed Dick with an

odd smile. "You see, I don't know that the woman I want wants me."

"Oh, you have n't asked her?" quickly.

"No."

"You can't like her such an awful lot, then, if you take so much time to think about it," said Gret judicially.

"No?" A strange look came into Dick Swinton's eyes as he looked down on the girl before him. "I 've wanted her ever since she was big enough for a man to look at. To me she 's always been the sweetest thing in the way of a woman that ever happened."

Gret looked quickly up, attracted by the ring in the deep but quiet voice. "Who is it?" she demanded sharply.

"You!"

Gret sat and looked up at him in a sort of magnetized silence, and Dick's eyes rested steadily on her face. Then she rose, still gazing amazedly at him; and as she came to her feet he took both her hands in a grip of steel.

"Me!" she breathed. "You want to marry *me*?"

Dick nodded; he could find no words just then.

"Oh, Dick! Why, I never even dreamed—" She laughed, a little, pained laugh. Then she sighed. "Well, you won't when—" She looked at him almost timidly. She had never before seen in his eyes such an expression as they held then. She tried to withdraw her hands, but they were not released. Could this be—Dick, that she had known all these years, loved *her*? Well, she would tell him all. She remembered Errol's scornful inquiry, "And you did n't mind deceiving me?" No other man should ever be deceived by her. And besides, then Dick would need no answer. She looked up at him again.

"Dick, are you in a hurry to get back to camp?"

"No," grimly; "I have plenty of time to hear you say yes or no. And that 's what you 've got to say, Gret, and before you leave me. I meant to wait a few months

longer, to give you more time to forget. But you brought it on yourself by coming up to me here this evening. I was thinking about you anyway. And then you talked as you did. And now you must speak."

"I will," hurriedly. "But I want to tell you something, Dick. After that—"

"Well—and after that?"

"You shall decide," gently.

The clasp on her hands tightened, and Dick came so close to her that she backed away from him against the tree. "Do you mean that it will rest with me whether I have you or not?" he demanded.

"Yes," slowly. "If you want me after that—"

But Dick laughed exultantly. "Then don't bother to tell me anything. I don't want to know anything; I don't care. I—"

Gret's eyes flashed wide. "Yes, you shall! You shall hear what I want to say—everything!" she said fiercely. "One man accused me of deceiving him when I only thought of keeping a secret. You shall not be deceived. Loose my hands, then I 'll hurry and tell you everything."

He complied, watching her in a puzzled way, but still with the passion of possession in his eyes. And Gret leaned against the great fir, and nerved herself for one more ordeal.

"Don't look at me, please," she pleaded. But Dick smiled slightly.

"No use asking me not to look at you now."

And so, feeling the color creep over her face, and with eyes firmly fixed on the cañon, Gret put into brief but perfectly truthful condensation the story of her early marriage, her undoing, and Robin's death. She told the exact truth, all of it and nothing else. She did not try to shield herself in any way; but brief as her recital was, the

sorrow and tragedy of it was apparent. She ended with a sigh.

"And now he's dead—and—it's all right—"

And then she looked up with a smile. She did not expect much outspoken condemnation from Dick; but—she did not think that house would be built on the hillside.

Dick's face as he listened to some part of the girl's story had been a study in overwhelming amazement, especially as, in opening, she told of her girlish marriage; but long before she ended pity had taken the place of amaze. She spoke of things as they had appeared to her, and, knowing her so well, he had understood.

And when she ended and looked up, the quality of the man's love, that trusted everything, and thought nothing of self or of anything but her, was shown. He stooped suddenly and gathered the girl into his arms with a force that almost frightened her. She had never felt anything like the clasp of his arms about her, and the lips that caressed every inch of her face were instinct with a man's undivided passion. Errol had been fond of her, but Gret well knew that he had never loved her like that.

"You poor little girl," he muttered softly. "You poor little kid facing all your troubles alone. Why did n't you come to me? I would have helped you. Did n't you know I loved you? Have you been blind all these years? Could n't you see that that sweet life that you were always trying to throw to the winds was more to me than mine? Don't you know that when you were going to marry Errol Ludlowe my life was n't worth two cents to me? It was done for. But I kept plodding on, because there was nothing else to do. And now!"—he pressed her face against his. "I've got you!"

Gret turned her face against the rough serge of his breast. It was nice, after all, to know that some one wanted her; to know that there was one at all events to

whom her life was of great value. And she lay still and listened as he talked softly to her.

"How could I ever have kept still all these years?" he wondered, with his lips against her temple. "But I knew you did n't care particularly for me, and that if I showed you too early it would frighten you away from me. Would it, Gret?"

Gret thought, with her face still hidden. "Yes, I believe it would—even one day earlier."

Dick smiled. "I know you don't love me as I do you," he went on gently. "Or as you did *him*. He was the kind of man to make a woman love him, and you did, by the way you spoke just now. But I'm not afraid. I believe that when a woman has lived with a man and been his wife for a few months, if he's good and kind to her, she'll come to love him. And you shall love me."

After a moment he released her, stroked the hair away from her forehead, and kissed her again. "And now I must take you home, sweetheart. It'll be getting dark."

They walked home slowly, his arm about her shoulders much of the way. They talked of many things—of their future together and Dick's plans for it; of Eva and Bertie; of Mrs. Silway, left alone in her little home, but never of the past. And Gret knew very well that she would never again hear from Dick of that past whose sad page she had turned back for his judgment to rest upon.

Dick left her on the landing of her home, and rowed back to the camp. But Gret did not go up into the house at once. She sat down on the landing-step, and looked absently into the soft, lapping waters. She smiled, a slightly cynical, but not unhappy, smile.

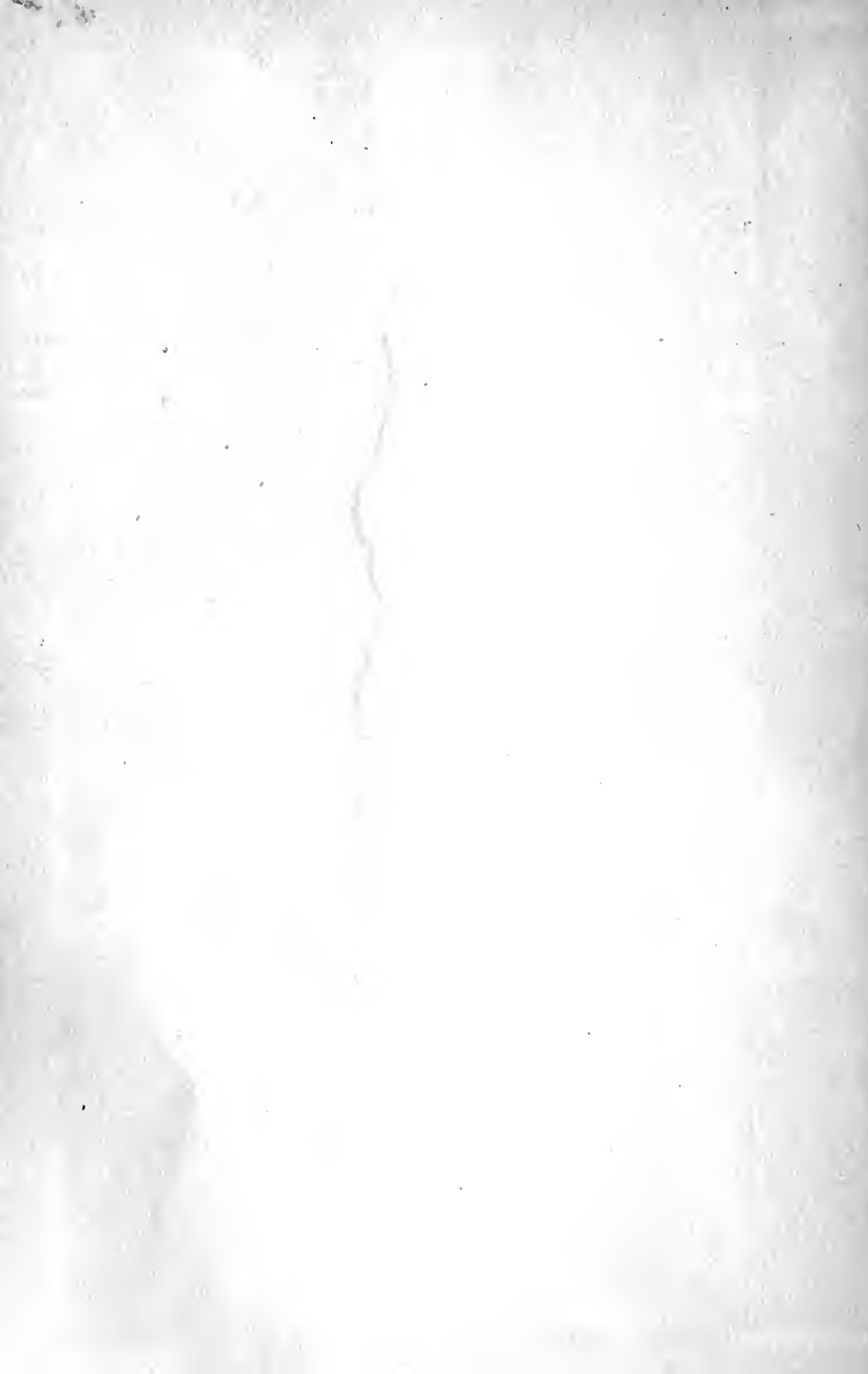
She would be very good to Dick, and, if it lay in her power, would surely make him happy. He was so good. And she was so glad that some one wanted her. And she was sure she would come to love him, even as he said,

because he would be everything to her—friend, husband, companion.

But now and then, at twilight, just between her and the Hidden One, in whose face her memories were mirrored, she might look and see a face whose strange, cynical power time could not lessen, and meet again the slow, quiet glance of loved eyes.

Just a memory, because she could not forget. All that remained between her and the Hidden One alone. Just a memory! And how could the dead harm the living?

THE END



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